FROZEN IN MOTION

*Motion-Driven Visual Identity Systems
in Urban Cultural Enclaves
Sistemi di identità visiva basati
sul movimento
nei quartieri culturali urbani*

A Red
DECRATION
Lattern

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ABSTRACT/EN

When cultural elements are removed from their original contexts, they undergo parallel evolutions. Many cultural enclaves serve as spaces where these elements are transported from their places of origin. Within this context, visual communication sustains and redefines cultural identity within these enclaves, while migrant cultural symbols are often amplified—such as Middle Eastern patterns, Indian totems, and Chinese lanterns or pandas. Migrant communities emphasize their ethnic identity to establish a presence in foreign lands. For both creators and observers, unconscious biases often arise due to economic integration, community-driven identity construction, and local perception. These cultural expressions are also shaped by interactions with the host culture while simultaneously retaining a sense of temporal "freeze", often reflective of the period during which migration occurred.

How can communication design and communication languages/computational approaches showcase and represent the interplay between cultural preservation and transformation in urban immigrant enclaves while moving beyond stereotypical representations?

In this research, Paolo Sarpi (Milano, Italia) has been chosen as a key research subject from the perspective of migration waves and through an analysis of its visual and communicative elements.

The final part of this research is a design project based on the insights gained from the study. It focuses on creating a visual identity for an Italian-Chinese cultural event centre, using generative design techniques. The goal is to go beyond common stereotypes and create a new way of visually representing multicultural urban communities. This project builds on the unique style of these urban realities and encourages designers to find creative ways to balance the preservation of cultural heritage with its adaptation to the host society.

RIASSUNTO/IT

Quando gli elementi culturali vengono rimossi dai loro luoghi di origine, essi subiscono evoluzioni parallele. Molti "enclavi culturali" fungono da spazi in cui gli elementi culturali vengono tasformati rispetto al loro contesto originale; in questo scenario, la comunicazione visiva sostiene e ridefinisce l'identità culturale all'interno di queste enclavi. I simboli culturali dei migranti vengono spesso amplificati, come i motivi mediorientali, i totem indiani, le lanterne o i panda cinesi. Le comunità migranti enfatizzano la propria identità etnica per affermare la loro presenza in terre straniere.

Per i creatori e gli osservatori, esiste spesso un pregiudizio inconscio dovuto all'economia, dalla comunità e alla percezione locale. Questi cambiamenti sono influenzati dalle interazioni con la cultura ospitante, ma conservano anche una sorta di "congelamento temporale", riflettendo spesso il periodo in cui la migrazione è avvenuta.

Sorge una domanda: come possono il design della comunicazione e i linguaggi comunicativi/ approcci computazionali rivelare e rappresentare l'interazione tra conservazione e trasformazione culturale nelle enclavi urbane di immigrati, andando oltre le rappresentazioni stereotipate?

In questa ricerca, Paolo Sarpi (MI, Italia) è stato scelto come oggetto di studio chiave dal punto di vista delle ondate migratorie e dell'analisi degli elementi visivi e comunicativi. L'ultima parte consiste in un intervento progettuale basato sugli aprendimenti derivati dalla ricerca: la creazione dell'identità visiva per un centro culturale italo-cinese, sfruttando tecniche di design generativo.

L'obiettivo è quello di trascendere gli stereotipi convenzionali e proporre un nuovo lessico visivo per rappresentare le realtà multiculturali urbane. Il progetto vuole Ispirare i designer a trovare modalità creative per mediare meglio il patrimonio culturale e le sue trasformazioni nel paese ospitante.

INTRODUCTION
INTRODUZIONE

This thesis investigates global cultural enclaves, with a particular focus on the Milan Paolo Sarpi area. By applying geosemiotics, this research examines both textual and non-textual signs within the district. Additionally, it integrates an analysis of existing local design projects, successful Chinese cultural communication cases, and explorations in dynamic identity design. The goal is to develop a visual communication model for cultural enclaves, using the Centro Culturale Cinese d'Italia [1] as an experimental application space. This study aims to explore how these spaces represent culture and how perception is influenced when encountering oriented stereotypes.

The first section defines ethnic enclaves and analyzes their potential cultural impact. These enclaves often emerge as hubs of economic labor activity. Taking Chinatowns as an example, many are not officially recognized by the Chinese government; however, they have become key windows through which host countries and the world understand Chinese culture. Additionally, the cultural positioning of these enclaves varies over time and depending on the original homeland of their immigrant communities, shaping how host countries perceive them. This section focuses on how these dynamic changes influence the cultural dissemination within ethnic enclaves.

The second section examines the Paolo Sarpi zone from the perspective of geo-semiotics, focusing on linguistic choices, linguistic arrangements, and non-verbal visual symbols present in the area. Among these three dimensions, language choice is considered the primary focus, based on the principle that "language is the fundamental medium of communication." This section presents a data visualization analysis of all linguistic choices found in Paolo Sarpi. One particularly notable finding is that homophony is exceptionally prevalent in shop signs and product names within Paolo Sarpi—surpassing both English and Italian. This section explores this phenomenon from the perspective of Chinese cultural identity, attempting to understand how homophony functions as a unique means of cultural dissemination in ethnic enclaves.

In the third section design methodologies through an analysis of contemporary design projects in Paolo Sarpi, significant international festivals held in China, and dynamic design case studies. Design tools and strategies used in these projects are summarized to identify effective methods for cultural transmission. Dynamic identity design based on grid systems has emerged as a particularly noteworthy approach. The final part of this section focuses on classifications and applications of dynamic grid-based identity design, aiming to establish a systematic framework for cultural identity representation.Conclusion: Towards a Participant-Driven Dynamic Design Approach, The conclusion discusses my perspective on participant-driven dynamic design within ethnic enclaves. This approach is based on the assumption that stereotypes cannot be entirely eliminated but can be reshaped into more acceptable forms.

The fourth section introduces a design concept that explores participatory visual identity in ethnic enclaves. The Centro Culturale Cinese is taken as a case study, demonstrating how dynamic design can be leveraged to construct a new form of cultural representation within ethnic enclaves.

[1] Centro Culturale Cinese is a cultural center located in Milan, Italy, dedicated to promoting Chinese language, arts, and cultural exchange. It offers courses, performances, exhibitions, and various cultural exchange programs. The center plays a key role in fostering cross-cultural dialogue between the Chinese community and the local Italian population. More information can be found at www.centroculturalecinese.com.

1.1 WHAT ARE ETHNIC ENCLAVES ?

1.2 WHAT ARE ETHNIC ENCLAVES FOR THE HOST COUNTRY.

1.3 THE POTENTIAL CULTURAL IMPACT OF CHINA TOWN

1.4 CONCLUSION

1.1 WHAT ARE ETHNIC ENCLAVES?

In sociology, an ethnic enclave is a geographic area with a high ethnic concentration, a distinct cultural identity, and significant economic activity. The term is typically used to refer to either a residential area or a workspace with a high concentration of ethnic businesses. Their success and growth depend on self-sufficiency and are often associated with economic prosperity.

The term "ethnic enclave" emerged following a publication by Alejandro Portes and Kenneth Wilson in 1980 (Portes and Wilson 1980). Portes and Wilson identified a third labour market in which Cuban immigrants in Miami participated. Instead of entering the secondary labour markets of the host society, they found that new immigrants often became employed by co-ethnics running immigrant-owned businesses. The collection of small immigrant enterprises providing employment to new immigrants was defined as the enclave economy.

Multiple ethnic enclaves were examined as representative examples.

1.1.1 EXAMPLES

Fig. 1.1 Indian Square.

Fig. 1.2. Korea Town.

INDIA SQUARE

India Square in Jersey City, New Jersey, is one of 24 Indian ethnic enclaves in the New York City Metropolitan Area.Since 1992, every year, a colour-filled spring festival takes place in Jersey City, in India Square. This event attracts significant participation and international media attention. In 2023, a large white Bengal tiger street mural was added to the area.

KOREAN TOWN

Broad Avenue, Korea-town in Palisades Park, New Jersey, United States, is home to a significant Korean community, where Koreans comprise the majority (52%) of the population.

This municipality has one of the highest densities of ethnic Koreans in the Western Hemisphere.

CHINATOWN

Building on the discussion of ethnic enclaves, this section will now focus on "Chinatowns", which will provide a compelling case study due to their historical depth and socio-economic impact.

CHINATOWN IN LOS-ANGLES.

Los Angeles Chinatown became a commercial center for Chinese and other Asian businesses in 1938. The Chinatown seen today was developed through the efforts of Chinese-American community leader Peter Soo Hoo and designed by Hollywood film set designers.

SMALL GROCERY STORES. Small, specialized grocery stores remain important to the aging populations, as these stores provide access to traditional Chinese ingredients and imported good.

As noted in the statement: "Goods and services are typically offered in the ethnic group's language, and employees in the enclave economy are not necessarily required to conform to the social and cultural norms of the host country" (Zhou 1992, 87).

Fig. 1.3 Los Angeles Chinatown.

However, due to the pressures of gentrification and rising property costs, many of these family-owned grocery stores have been gradually disappearing.

The changing nature of these businesses marks a turning point in the transformation of ethnic enclaves. Whereas Chinatown was once a space primarily designed to sustain immigrant livelihoods, it is increasingly becoming a cultural landmark that reflects both heritage preservation and economic adaptation.

RESTAURANTS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY. Restaurants in Los Angeles Chinatown serve as key cultural and economic hubs. They not only provide famil-

After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake (see Figure 1.5) and the subsequent fire destroyed San Francisco's Chinatown, including the Russo-Chinese Bank,

Look Tin Eli became "the public face of the post-quake rebuilding of Chinatown."

As general manager of the Sing Chong Bazaar, he envisioned the reconstruction of Chinatown as an "ideal Oriental city." Already a skilled negotiator, he secured substantial loans from his Hong Kong and Canton partners for the rebuilding. He also persuaded Chinese merchants to hire Western architects to design Chinatown in an "Oriental" style to promote tourism and social change(see Figure 1.4).

construction of the pagoda-topped buildings of the Sing Chong and Sing Fat Bazaars on the west corners of Grant Avenue (formerly Dupont Street) and California Street.

Fig. 1.5 Earthquake in Sanfrancisco.

Fig. 1.4 Los Angeles San Francisco.

1.2 WHAT ARE ETHNIC ENCLAVES FOR THE HOST COUNTRY?

Ethnic enclaves are not only crucial for allowing self-sufficiency and economic development of immigrant communities but also significantly impact the socio-economic structure of host countries. Steven J. Gold (2010) defines ethnic enclaves as geographically delimited regions where immigrants with common ethnic or national origins engage in economic activities, often with a significant degree of class diversity. These enclaves provide employment opportunities for new immigrants, enabling them to work in a familiar linguistic and cultural environment while mitigating the difficulties associated with entering the mainstream labour market (Light & Gold, 2000).

When new immigrants seek jobs in host country's labour market, it's possible to face the situation of not being able to be employed or being offered a lower salary compared to the one given to native individuals.

On the other side of the coin enclave based businesses help immigrants integrate into the host country. Goods and services are typically offered in the ethnic group's language, and employees in the enclave economy are not necessarily required to conform to the social and cultural norms of the host country.

As a result, ethnic enclaves present an irresistible advantage for new immigrants, drawing a substantial labour force into their economic sphere.

1.2.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME "CHINATOWN"

The significance of Chinese residing in Chinatown is substantial. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, local governments in many Western countries implemented policies that restricted Chinese immigrants, leading to the formation of "Chinatowns" as segregated communities rather than voluntary ethnic enclaves. In countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, anti-Chinese sentiment resulted in exclusionary laws that forced Chinese immigrants to settle in designated areas, often characterized by poor living conditions and limited economic opportunities.

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
Prohibited Chinese labour immigration, and local governments in cities like San Francisco imposed zoning laws that confined Chinese businesses and residences to specific areas, reinforcing the perception of "Chinatowns as ghettos rather than integrated communities.

The Chinese Head Tax (1885-1923)
The subsequent Chinese Immigration Act (1923) further restricted Chinese immigration and led to the stagnation of many Chinatowns,

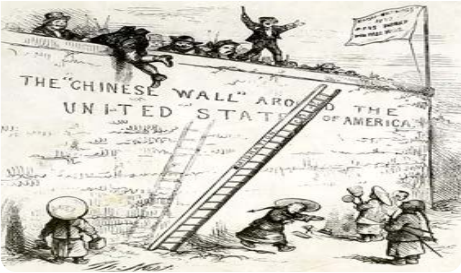such as those in Vancouver and Toronto, which became isolated from mainstream economic life.

Fig. 1.6 The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882).

Fig. 1.7 The Chinese Head Tax and Immigration Control in Canada.

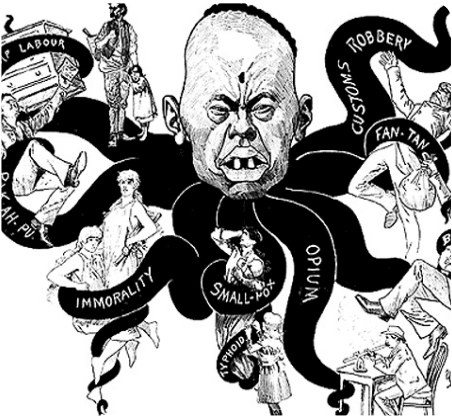Fig. 1.8 The White Australia Policy and Anti-Chinese Sentiment.

Fig. 1.8

The White Australia Policy (1901-1973)

Imposed strict immigration controls on non-European immigrants, including the Chinese, limiting their ability to expand beyond designated "Chinatowns" in cities like Sydney and Melbourne. "Chinatowns" have never been isolated communities; rather, they have always been shaped by both local policies (such as urban planning, cultural recognition, and economic regulations) and international relations (particularly in relation to China's global rise). Over time, these enclaves have evolved from marginalized immigrant districts into celebrated cultural and economic hubs, and in recent decades, they have increasingly been viewed as extensions of China's global influence. This transformation has been driven by shifts in local policies and public perception.

However, Since the 21st century,the international statues of China-town has no longer only shaped by the local policy but also increasingly influenced by global geopolitics.

THE BACKDROP OF RISING CHINA

Since China's accession to the World TradeOrganization (WTO)1 in 2001, the country has become the world's second-largest economy and a leading global trading power (World Bank, 2021).

China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 significantly accelerated its integration into the global economy, transforming Chinatowns from localized ethnic enclaves into international nodes of economic and cultural exchange. This period marked a substantial increase in China's economic influence, with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rising from approximately $1.3 trillion in 2001 to $17.7 trillion by 2021, according to World Bank data.

As China's trade influence expanded, Chinatowns in major cities like London and New York evolved into hubs for multinational corporations, luxury brands, and tourism, reflecting China's growing economic clout. This shift redefined global perceptions, positioning Chinatowns not solely as marginalized immigrant communities but as symbols of China's modernity and global interconnectedness.

1.2.2 Chinatowns as a political Indicator

On the other hand, as the global influence expands , "Chinatowns" shifts as a political indicator.

In recent years ,with growing tensions surrounding U.S-China relations and Taiwan issues, some countries have begun re-evaluating the role of Chinatown and their potential links to Chinese political influence.

The U.S. "China Initiative" (2018–2022) exemplified how geopolitical tensions reshaped perceptions of Chinatowns. Launched to counter economic espionage, the DOJ program faced backlash for allegedly targeting Chinese American scientists and community groups based on ethnicity, fostering distrust.

Investigations revealed efforts by the The Chinese Communist Party has been reported to leverage Chinatown associations, such as hometown groups, to extend political influence, blurring the distinction between cultural enclaves and geopolitical tools. The termination of the U.S. "China Initiative" in 2022 highlighted its unintended consequences, including racial profiling and the suppression of academic collaboration (Brennan Center, Wikipedia).

Similar concerns have emerged globally: in Australia, Chinese diaspora organizations faced scrutiny under foreign influence laws, prompting investigations into alleged state-backed interference via community networks (ASPI). In Canada, Vancouver's Chinatown has become a site of contention between pro-Beijing and pro-Hong Kong factions, mirroring broader geopolitical tensions over China's policies (CSIS Reports).

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, Chinatowns have been integrated into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), serving as economic conduits for major infrastructure projects, such as Indonesia's Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail (ASEAN Briefing). These cases illustrate how Chinatowns, historically spaces of cultural and economic activity, have increasingly become focal points in global political discourse.

An article from Radio Free Asia titled "UK Confucius Institutes' Screening of Applicants' Political and Ethnic Backgrounds Raises Concerns Over Academic Freedom"[1] highlights that Confucius Institutes in the UK are scrutinizing job applicants' political affiliations and ethnic backgrounds during their hiring processes.

Fig. 1.9 The Opening of a Confucius Institute and Its Policy.

1.2.3 Conclusion

The status of "Chinatowns" has undergone remarkable transformation—from segregated immigrant enclaves in the 19th century to vibrant cultural and economic centres in modern cities, and now, in the 21st century, key sites within China's expanding global influence. While local policies determine the level of integration "Chinatowns" achieve within their host societies, international relations shape their external image and political significance.

In contrast to being regarded as isolated ethnic enclaves in the 20th century. People's perceptions of Chinatown in the 21st century have become increasingly intertwined with China's international image, geopolitical relations, and cultural export (Ien Ang)[2].

1   Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. The Darkness Deepens: The Crackdown on Human Rights in China 2016–2020. London: Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Confucius_Institutes
2   Ien Ang, "Chinatowns and the Rise of China," Modern Asian Studies (2019): 202, doi:10.1017/S0026749X19000179.

1.3 THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL IMPACT OF CHINATOWN

When I first began this thesis, initially Chinatown was perceived as the most powerful tool for cultural dissemination overseas.

However, as my research progressed, it became evident that Chinatown is better understood from a semiotic perspective. Zukin (1995)[1] highlights how urban spaces, including ethnic enclaves, are shaped by both economic forces and symbolic representations, reinforcing cultural identities while also subject to reinterpretation by local and global actors. These insights suggest that Chinatown is not just a passive medium of Chinese cultural export but a dynamic site of meaning-making, where identity, history, and power intersect.

1.3.1 Cultural Dynamic in Diaspora Communities

Before discussing the cultural impact of Chinatown, it is essential to first clarify the definition of culture. When standing on Paolo Sarpi Street , Milan's Chinatown, as a Chinese individual, I cannot help but feel a sense of distortion in the ethnic decorations that surround this street. In China, such decorations are not commonly used to signify or reinforce Chinese identity. Yet, within these ethnic enclaves in a European city, they are undeniably perceived as authentic representations of Chinese culture. This raises a fundamental question: What is indigenous and what is not?

Fig. 1.10 Via Paolo Sarpi.

Culture is not a fixed or singular entity; rather, it is "an amalgam of cross-cultural influences, blended, patch-worked, and layered upon one another" (Yazdiha, 2023, Conceptualizing Hybridity).

The construction of "Chinatowns" by immigrant communities reflects this hybrid nature of culture. In their efforts to establish a familiar sense of belonging in a foreign land, Anderson (1983) discusses the imagined nature of community identity, "immigrants create an "imagined ethnic community". However, these spaces do not simply replicate the cultural landscape of their homeland; instead, they reflect a selectively preserved and reinterpreted version of that culture, often frozen in time.

1   Zukin, Sharon. 1995. The Cultures of Cities. Oxford: Blackwell.
2   Anderson, Benedict. 1983. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

The phenomenon of cultural freezing is particularly pronounced in diasporic communities. When immigrants leave their homeland, they carry with them a specific version of their cultural identity—one shaped by the socio-political and historical context of their departure. Over time, as their homeland continues to evolve, their cultural practices within the enclave may remain static, leading to a divergence between how culture is perceived within the diaspora and how it develops in its place of origin.

From asking which history the diasporic should identify with to asking if it is even possible to return a homeland one never knew or left long ago.

This explains why symbols, aesthetics, and traditions within ethnic enclaves often seem antiquated or exaggerated to visitors from the homeland. The Chinatown aesthetic, for instance, is not necessarily an accurate reflection of contemporary China but rather a symbolic construction that blends historical memory, nostalgia, and the necessity of cultural self-representation in a foreign environment (Lai, 2004,Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities).

Furthermore, the very process of cultural adaptation and reinvention within the diaspora highlights the dynamic, traveling nature of culture. As Yazdiha (2023) suggests, culture itself is a traveller, collecting artifacts from various locations along the way. This means that what is perceived as "authentic" in one context may be a hybrid construct influenced by multiple cultural forces. "Chinatowns", therefore, are not just reflections of Chinese culture but also of the host country's interpretations and expectations of that culture. The visual and symbolic language of Chinatown often caters to both the diasporic community's desire for cultural continuity and the mainstream society's orientalist imagination of what "Chinese-ness" should look like (Said, 1978,Orientalism).

This dual process of cultural preservation and adaptation demonstrates that cultural identity is neither entirely indigenous nor entirely foreign—it is in constant negotiation. The notion of an unchanging, pure cultural essence is challenged by the experience of diaspora, which underscores the fluidity and adaptability of cultural identity. What is considered "authentic" in one moment may be redefined in another, depending on historical shifts, migration patterns, and global cultural exchanges.

Ultimately, Chinatowns and other ethnic enclaves serve as living archives of cultural memory, simultaneously preserving, reinventing, and reinterpreting traditions in ways that speak to both the past and the present. They reveal how culture is not only inherited but also continuously reshaped by the diasporic experience, reflecting the complexities of migration, identity, and belonging.

1.3.2 Purpose Oriented Stereotype is an effective communication

The "look" of Chinatown is profoundly sensory, characterized by ornate decorations, language, calligraphy, lanterns, sounds, and even distinct aromas.

Although multiple researchers have argued that Chinatown represents an Orientalist stereotype, which "turns every observable detail into a generalization and every generalization into an immutable law about the Oriental nature" (Said, 1979:1-2), Chinese leaders and developers did not initially oppose this "Orientalist" portrayal, especially when constructing "Chinatowns" within commercial spaces such as "Walking-friendly" shopping streets.

Fig. 1.11 Chinatown in Los Angeles.

These aesthetic choices were often strategic, serving to attract non-Chinese consumers and position Chinatown as a tourist spectacle rather than just an ethnic enclave (Wang, 1999).

However, the perception of such representations began to shift with the introduction of the concept of "ethnic stereotyping" in the mid-20th century. The term "stereotype" was first coined in a psychological and sociological sense by Walter Lippmann[1] in Public Opinion (1922), where he described it as a fixed, oversimplified belief about a particular group. By the 1960s and 1970s, scholars such as Stuart Hall (1997) and Edward Said (1979) further developed critiques of racial and cultural stereotyping, arguing that these representations were often created by dominant groups to define and control marginalized communities. This academic discourse influenced urban studies and cultural geography, leading to critical reassessments of how ethnic enclaves, including "Chinatowns", were being represented (Lai, 2007).

By the 1980s and 1990s, with increasing awareness of racial and cultural stereotyping, urban planners and community leaders began reconsidering the ways Chinatown should be represented—moving away from purely decorative, nostalgic Orientalism (Dirlik, 1996) toward a more

1.   Walter Lippmann (1889–1974): American journalist who coined "stereotype" in Public Opinion (1922), analyzing cultural symbols' societal impact.

functional, community-centered approach. Instead of serving as exotic spaces designed for external consumption, some Chinatowns started embracing designs that reflected contemporary Chinese diasporic[2] identities rather than a Western perception of the "traditional" Chinese aesthetic (Lin, 2011).

Historically, Chinatown was deliberately designed to incorporate ethnic symbols, reinforcing an exotic representation of Chinese culture. This approach was particularly evident in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when "Chinatowns" in Western cities were constructed with pagoda-style roofs, intricate archways, and red lanterns—elements that catered to a Western imagination of the "Orient" rather than an authentic reflection of Chinese urban landscapes (Anderson, 1991).

Fig. 1.12 Foo Chow Restaurant.

Chinatown in Los Angeles became a commercial center for Chinese and other Asian businesses in 1938. The version seen today was developed under the leadership of Chinese-American community leader Peter Soo Hoo and was designed by Hollywood film set designers, further reinforcing the notion that Chinatown's aesthetics were crafted for an external audience rather than for the community itself.

The action-comedy film Rush Hour (1998), starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker, features several scenes filmed in Los Angeles' Chinatown. Notably, the "Fu Chow Restaurant" located in Chinatown served as a significant filming location.

In films centered around Chinatown, directors often employ a rich tapestry of Chinese cultural elements to create a specific ambiance and visual effect. These elements include red lanterns, paifang (traditional Chinese archways), and lion dance performances, all aiming to convey a strong sense of Oriental charm and mystery. This cinematic portrayal sig-

2.   Communities dispersed from ancestral homelands, maintaining cultural identity. See William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," Diaspora 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99.

nificantly shapes the public's perception and imagination of Chinatown.

As one interviewer expressed in an interview with The New York Times (2012), "it's not like in the movies, where there are lots of lanterns and performances everywhere."

Similarly, in 21st-century South Africa, so-called "Chinatown" and government-led Chinese cultural projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cultural hubs, have emerged. As Harrison (2018) explain, these represent "traditional 'Chinatown' activities." Cultural symbols such as miniature pagoda-shaped watchtowers, small-scale gateways, and red lanterns adorn both the exterior and interior of these spaces, evoking a "Chinese" cultural atmosphere. Rather than asserting an explicitly Chinese territorial identity, these cultural symbols construct an ethnic experience for South African consumers.

Fig. 1.13 Scene in Rush Hour(Brett Ratner, dir. Rush Hour. New Line Cinema, 1998.
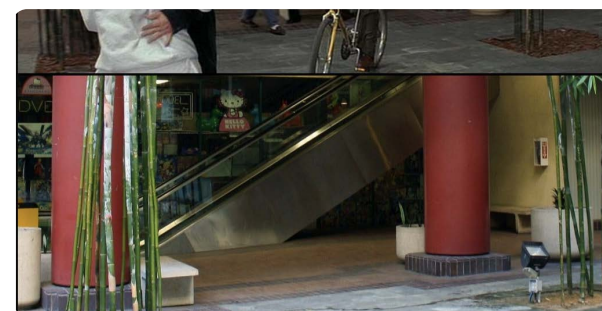
Fig. 1.13

Fig. 1.14 Official poster of Rush Hour (1998).

Fig. 1.14

Fig. 1.15 Scene in Detective Chinatown.

Fig. 1.15

1.3.3 Influence of Local Policies and International Relations

In discussing the significance of Chinatown, it becomes evident that business owners intentionally associate themselves with the image of a powerful China in the global imagination."

In recent years, the Chinese government has emphasized the role of overseas Chinese as"grassroots ambassadors"(民间大使), encouraging them to promote China's international image through cultural activities and economic ties Wang, 2021 . This strategy is reflected in several key areas:

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The Chinese government actively supports overseas Chinese communities in organizing Lunar New Year celebrations , establishing Confucius Institutes , and promoting Mandarin education and Chinese culture in Chinatown districts. For example, in New York, the Chinatown Lunar New Year festival has evolved into a city-wide event, receiving sponsorship from both local businesses and Chinese governmental institutions.

Indeed, If we take a historical perspective on Chinese migration, we find that early Chinese immigrants in host countries were not only marginalized and faced significant hardships, as previously mentioned, but also lacked effective support from the Chinese government at the time. One of the primary interviewees for this research. Mr. K, is a long-time business owner in Chinatown who has witnessed first hand the evolving relationship between the Chinese diaspora and the Chinese state.

As Mr. K observed:

"We never expected the Chinese government to help us back then."

ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

The Chinese government has encouraged overseas Chinese entrepreneurs to strengthen business ties with the Chinese market, and other parts of the world. These early overseas Chinese communities (华侨) often maintained cultural ties to their homeland but received little direct support or protection from Chinese authorities.

THE HISTORY CONTEXT OF CHINESE MIGRATION

Chinese Overseas Migrants and Their Relationship with China Over Time

Starting in the 19th century, large numbers of laborers and merchants left Qing dynasty China for Southeast Asia, the Americas, and other parts of the world. These early overseas Chinese communities often maintained cultural ties to their homeland but received little direct support or protection from Chinese authorities.

After 1949, the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) was cautious about asserting control over or aiding the Chinese diaspora, partly to avoid alarming host countries.

At the 1955 Bandung Conference,[1] Premier Zhou Enlai urged overseas Chinese to respect local laws, signaling a hands-off approach. In 1980, the PRC formally banned dual citizenship, effectively encouraging Chinese migrants to naturalize abroad. Over the following decades, Beijing generally distanced itself from older Chinese migrant communities, prioritizing state-to-state relations over direct intervention on behalf of ethnic Chinese abroad.

Many long-established Chinese communities in Southeast Asia (e.g., in Thailand and Malaysia) gradually integrated into their host societies, adopting local cultural and economic practices. This meant that the connection between the diaspora and the Chinese state remained tenuous—overseas Chinese largely had to fend for themselves or rely on local networks rather than Beijing.

PRC POLICIES DURING ECONOMIC REFORMS

China's approach to the diaspora began to shift with the economic reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Seeing the diaspora as a potential asset, Beijing cultivated ties to overseas Chinese as contributors to China's modernization. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to view "its diaspora" as an important resource for national development .

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the government established special economic zones like Shenzhen and Xiamen, explicitly to attract overseas Chinese investment, and enacted policies to welcome donations and remittances . However, these efforts were largely one-directional – focused on harnessing the financial networks of overseas Chinese for China's benefit . The Real economic support have come after China joined WTO.

"Since its accession to the WTO, China has been the fastest growing trading nation in the world."--Director-General of the WTO Pascal Lamy told an audience in Shanghai on 6 September 2006.According the interview with Mr.K,..

Author: Did you receive any support from the Chinese government in the 1990s?

Mr.K: "No, not really. We were on our own since we came out, but it's true that there were more business men since China joined WTO,good thing for general business.bad thing for the overseas Chinese who already rooted in these area,Because everyone started doing trade in this area".

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1   Bandung Conference (Asian-African Conference), 1955. See Kahin, George McTurnan. 1956. The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Given the historically distant stance of the Chinese government and the fact that many overseas Chinese communities have been deeply rooted in their host countries for generations, "It is essential to distinguish between China's state-led cultural outreach in Chinatowns and locally organized activities within these communities. To categorize all cultural expressions in Chinatowns as mere extensions of China's external cultural diplomacy would be an oversimplification, as it overlooks the diverse motivations behind such events.

For instance, the dragon and lion dance performances in Milan's Chinatown are entirely funded by the Milanese Chinese Chamber of Commerce, reflecting a locally driven effort to foster cultural identity rather than a state-directed initiative. This distinction highlights the need to critically assess the agency of local Chinese communities in shaping their own cultural landscape, rather than attributing all such activities to the Chinese government's global soft power strategy.

Fig. 1.16 Official Dragon Show Poster in Milan, 2025.

The event's main organizing units (see Fig. 1.16) primarily consist of local Chinese business associations, which play a leading role in planning and executing the celebration. While the Consulate General of China in Milan is listed as a guiding unit, its role is largely advisory rather than managerial. The structure of this organizing body reflects a broader trend in overseas Chinese cultural activities, where community-based associations serve as the primary driving force behind events.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored how a centralized economic hub can drive the transformation of Chinatown. Initially perceived as isolated and unwelcoming enclaves, "Chinatowns" have, under purpose-driven development, evolved into ethnic shopping districts that integrate both cultural and economic functions.

This transformation has played a significant role in shaping contemporary dynamic culture, demonstrating how cultural diffusion occurs from the homeland to the host country. Chinatowns have transitioned from spaces of marginalization to diasporic hubs, where ethnic identity is both preserved and redefined. As such, it is crucial to further examine their development and integration within broader urban landscapes.

2.1 WHAT FROZE PAOLO SARPI'S SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE?

Fig. 2.1 Google Earth (bottom) and Google Street View (top) representations of shop signs. The map at the bottom indicates locations, while the images above provide a closer look at shop sign details.

凤凰贸易
PHOENIX

百好贸易
MASSIMO s.a.s.

温福贸
*WEN F
TRADII*

PREFACE

If you walk through Milan's Chinatown on Via Paolo Sarpi, you will observe two striking phenomena.

On the north side of Via Paolo Sarpi, stretching approximately 350 to 500 meters from the western end (the green part of figure 2.1) —the most central part of this commercial street—nearly all the shops have been shuttered, though their shop signs remains intact. Among these, In this section, 3 shops are wholesale trade stores—a type of business that has nearly vanished from the main streets of Chinatown since 2008.

About 200 meters from east to west at the intersection stands a store named Wang Oriented Store, now sandwiched between Koi storestore (KOI Store is a convenience store located at Via Paolo Sarpi, 11,) and a store named ZETA selling Japanese anime merchandise.
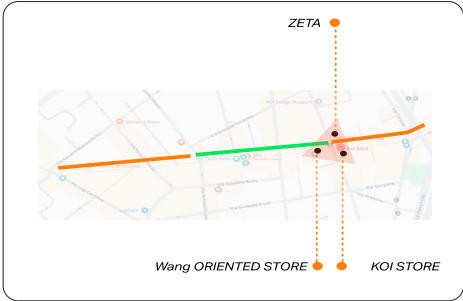
Fig. 2.2 Shop Sign Distribution and Spatial Context.
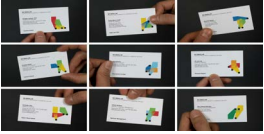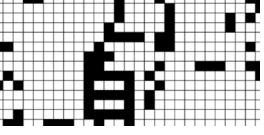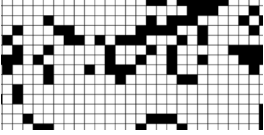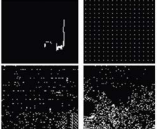
Fig. 2.3 StoreFront of Wang Oriented Store.

While the neighboring shops bustle with customers, Wang Oriented Store appears strikingly desolate, the customer flow could be reflected by the number of review of Google Map (table 1.1).

The entrance of Wang Oriented Store is adorned with handwritten couplets, and the windows display calligraphic Chinese characters for "Wang" (王), with no further decoration. Inside, the space is cluttered with haphazardly arranged goods (see figure 2.3).

TABLE 1.1 GOOGLE REVIEW METRICS OF SELECTED SHOPS

SHOP NAME	GOOGLE REVIRE SCREENSHOTS	THE NUMBER OF REVIEWS
ZETA		600
Wang ORIENTED STORE		1
KOI STORE		393

Today, most shops in Chinatown are dominated by food businesses. According to a report by Gambero Rosso International, "Paolo Sarpi "has become a true food district for the Chinese community", further solidifying its status as a culinary hub., including franchises imported from mainland China like CHABAI DAO, COCO, and THE ALLEY.

If we compare a traditional and modern shop signs, a stark contrast emerges, reflecting a 'frozen' duality. The shuttered shops on the western

side retain the original Songti[1] (宋体) Chinese shop sign Chinese shop sign —a font widely used in the 1980s–1990s. In contrast, modern franchises like " GUMING and THE ALLEY "feature bold, contemporary typography.

Chinese Immigration and Commercial Evolution in Milan

Fig. 2.4 Text on Shop Signs of "THE ALLEY", ChaPanda", CoCo".

The earliest Chinese immigrants arrived in Milan between 1920–1950, primarily from France and other European countries. They began as street vendors selling trinkets and gradually transitioned to leather workshops through relentless hard work (Farina et al. 1997, 37) .

The 1950–1970 period marked the "chain migration" phase, where new immigrants—often relatives of existing settlers—flocked to Milan not only from Europe but directly from China, most of them did not accept high education. Family networks became the backbone of economic activities, fostering tight-knit communities (Ceccagno 2003).

By the 1980s, Italy emerged as a primary destination for Chinese immigrants in Southern Europe, with Milan, Prato, and Florence becoming key hubs. By 2004, the Chinese population in Italy reached 111,712 (anagrafici data), making it the fourth-largest immigrant group (Ceccagno, 2003). Despite being labeled as "silent immigrants"—a term describing their low-profile economic integration—their economic success was undeniable. By 2006, their average monthly income ranged between €1,806–2,000, with an unemployment rate of 1.9%—far below the national average (Marcaletti, 2008).

The Rise and Fall of Wholesale Dominance

In 1997, specialized clothing wholesale stores began proliferating on Via Paolo Sarpi. By 2001, their numbers surged to 70, concentrated around Via Bramante and Viale Montello, accounting for one-third of all Chinese commercial activities (Cologna, 2002). These wholesalers adopt-

1   On the origin of Songti in Song dynasty woodblock printing, see Tsien Tsuen-hsuin, Paper and Printing, vol. 5 of Science and Civilisation in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 201–205. For its revival in the 1980s with laser phototypesetting, see Thomas S. Mullaney, The Chinese Typewriter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 273–280.
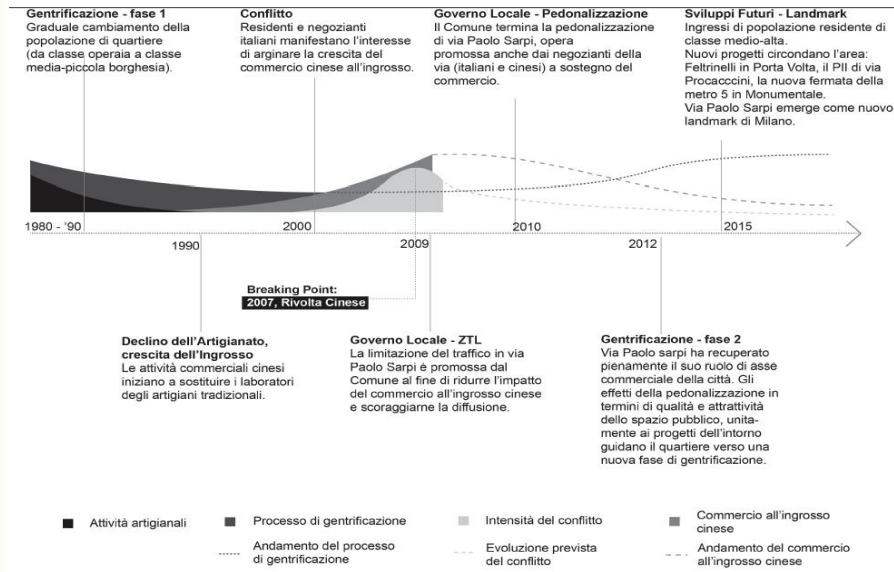
Fig. 2.5 Commercial Transformation of Via Paolo Sarpi (1980–2015).

ed aggressive pricing strategies, transforming Chinatown from a hub of artisanal workshops to a bustling trade district.

However, the influx of trucks, noise, and public space congestion sparked tensions with local residents. Protests erupted in 2000, led by the ViviSarpi Committee, and culminated in a violent clash on April 12, 2007—Italy's first major ethnic riot—triggered by a dispute over parking fines (Montagna & Hatziprokopiou, 2009).

In response, Milan's municipality designated Via Paolo Sarpi as a Limited Traffic Zone (a local policy restricting vehicular access to reduce congestion). in 2008 and fully pedestrianized it by 2011. While these measures aimed to curb wholesale activities, many businesses adapted by relocating to side streets or absorbing fines as operational costs (Zhang, 2013). By 2024, many of the western-side shops remain shuttered, serving as relics of the 1997–2008 wholesale boom, frozen in time(see the commecial transformation map in figure 2.5).

2.2 GEOSEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON CHINA TOWN
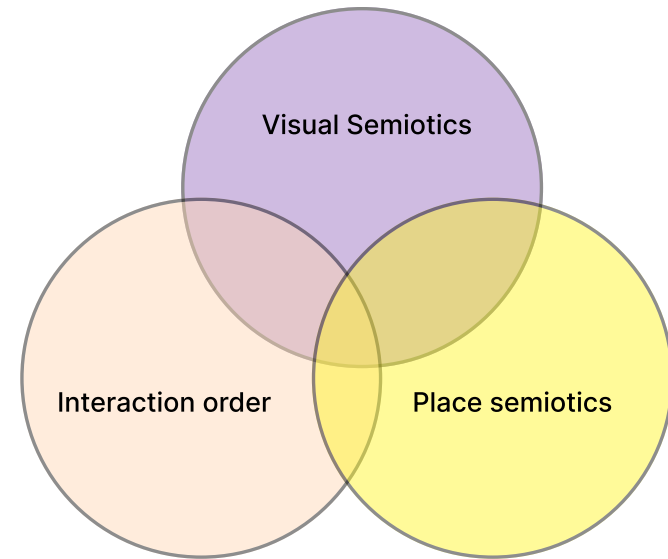
Fig. 2.6 Geosemiotic framework based on Scollon and Scollon (2003).

2.2.1 What Is Geosemiotic?

Geosemiotics was firstly developed by Scollon and Scollon (2003) in *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*, explores the relationship between language and spatial context, provides a framework for understanding the physical, material, and spatial context in which languages and signs acquire meaning. It conceptualizes place as a geosemiotic aggregate, where multiple semiotic systems—interaction order, visual semiotics, and place semiotics—are in dialogical interaction.

The first system, interaction order, is a term borrowed from Goffman (1983). It refers to the ongoing, ratified (yet also contested) social relationships we establish and maintain with others in our presence (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 16).

The second system, visual semiotics, concerns how images, signs, texts, and other visual artifacts are structured and interpreted. It includes a narrower definition from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), which focus-

es on the organization of meaning within visual fields, and a broader perspective that incorporates verbal elements (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8, 11). This broader definition is adopted in the current study.

The third system, place semiotics, examines the spatial organization of semiotic systems. It includes a typology of spaces based on their functions—such as front stage vs. backstage, private vs. public, display spaces vs. passage spaces (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 8). This system highlights how globalization and social change influence language, discourse, and spatial practices in public spaces (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010, 23).

According to Scollon and Scollon (2003, 110), geographical semiotics specifically investigates the social meaning of the material placement of signs, examining the relationship between signs and space. This study applies geosemiotics to analyze language choice, code preference, and visual semiotic symbols, exploring their role in shaping the semiotic landscape of Chinatown.

TABLE 2.1 A MODIFIED OUTLINE OF SEMIOTICS.

Geosemiotics		
Interaction Order: 1. Interpersonal distance (intimate, personal, social, pubic) 2. Personal front (appearance, behavior) 3. Units of interaction order (single, with, file or procession, queue, contact, service encounter, conversational encounter, meeting, people-processing encounter (interview, screening, examination), platform event, celebrative occasion)	**Visual Semiotics:** 1. Pictures (Represented participants modality, composition, interactive participants) 2. Material aspects of visual semiotics (moved from _place semiotics_, because they are intrinsic to the visually displayed language): code preference, inscription, emplacement	**Place Semiotics:** 1. Perceptual spaces (moved from _interaction order_, because these can be independent from the human interactants): visual, auditory, olfactory,thermal, haptic. 2. Use spaces: frontage or public (exhibit/display, passage, special use, secure), backstage or private, regulatory spaces (vehicle traffic, pedestrian traffic, public notice), commercial space (e.g. holiday market, shelf display of goods), transgressive space (e.g. homeless hangouts).

2.2.2 GEOSEMIOTIC CHARACTERISTIC OF CHINESE SHOP SIGNS

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON PAOLO SARPI ZONE.

From a geosemiotic perspective, Chinatown is not merely a commercial district with shops and signage but a semiotic aggregate—a "written city" where streets, architecture, and businesses are layered with symbolic elements such as Chinese signage, traditional architectural styles, and cultural motifs. These elements form "multiple semiotic systems in dialogical interaction with each other" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 12).

Analyzing Chinatown through semiotic landscape analysis is essential for understanding the cultural and linguistic messages embedded within its environment. The geosemiotic method is particularly useful in studying spaces where multiple languages and symbolic elements coexist, as seen in highly multicultural urban settings.

Robin Atilano De Los Reyes (2014) applies place semiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) to analyze how visual texts create meaning in specific locations. His study of 76 shop signs in Metro Manila, Philippines provides insights into how linguistic and symbolic choices reflect both historical narratives and contemporary urban dynamics.

2.2.2. 1 LANGUAGE CHOICE

Given that the Paolo Sarpi zone functions as an ethnic enclave within Italy, Italian remains the dominant public language in commercial and social interactions. However, the linguistic landscape of Chinatown also reflects a blend of Chinese and Italian elements, raising key questions:

How does the semiotic landscape of Chinatown communicate social, cultural, and political identities through language?

To what extent do legal policies shape linguistic choices on shop signage, as opposed to personal or community preferences?

This research aims to establish a temporal database documenting linguistic shifts in Paolo Sarpi's commercial signage. On one hand, it will examine the presence of multiple languages in shop signs, highlighting patterns of linguistic adaptation over time. On the other hand, a visual semiotic analysis will explore how Chinese cultural symbols contribute to meaning-making within the broader urban landscape (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

To accurately assess language use in Paolo Sarpi's shop signs, this section will analyze Milan's language policies, determining whether linguistic choices are dictated by legal frameworks or stem from shop owners' individual preferences

Language regulation in Milan

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR STOREFRONT SIGNS

Although Italy has not yet fully legislated mandatory language use for store-front signs, according to a report by Fanpage.it, a legislative proposal was introduced in June 2017 to mandate an Italian language exam for foreign business owners before opening a store (Fanpage.it 2018). It also suggested that store names should use European languages such as Italian, English, or French while prohibiting non-European scripts.

STOREFRONT SHOP SIGN APPROVAL AND TAXATION

In Italy, store signs, logos, and advertisements require approval from the local municipal government. For example, the Municipality of Milan mandates businesses to submit a Certified Notification of Business Activity (SCIA) and may require payment of the Unified Property Fee (CUP). CUP fees are determined based on Law 160/2019 and local regulations, varying according to the size and placement of the sign. Signs under 5 square meters used solely for business identification are exempt from the fee. Unauthorized advertisements may result in fines or mandatory removal (Comune di *Milano 2024).*

LANGUAGE AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PRODUCT PACKAGING

According to Article 9 of the Italian Consumer Code, all information intended for consumers and users must at least be provided in Italian (Hogan Lovells). This regulation mandates that all product labeling information, including non-mandatory content, must be translated into Italian to ensure consumers fully understand the product details.

Furthermore, according to the Chamber of Commerce of Milan, Monza, Brianza, and Lodi, all product labels must be written in Italian to ensure that consumers fully understand the product details. Failure to comply with this regulation may result in fines ranging from €516 to €25,823, depending on the product's price and number of units available for sale (Camera di Commercio Milano Monza Brianza Lodi 2024).[1]

Regarding country of origin labeling, while EU regulations generally do not mandate country of origin declarations, Italian law requires dual origin labeling in cases where a label explicitly states or implies a product's origin, but its main ingredients come from a different source . Therefore, products imported into Italy must clearly indicate their country of origin, such as "Made in China", to comply with consumer rights and regulatory requirements.

Based on the relevant legislation, Italy does not currently impose mandatory language requirements for storefront signs.

However, for non-EU businesses, the absence of a European language on signage may pose potential legal risks.

In contrast, regarding product packaging regulations, the Italian Consumer Code explicitly mandates that all information directed at consumers and users must be provided at least in Italian.

Overall, Italy does not impose explicit restrictions on the use of foreign languages for products or signage. However, while the choice of language for storefront signs remains flexible, the presence of Italian on product labels is mandatory.

CONCLUSION

Italy does not enforce mandatory language requirements for storefront signs. However, for non-EU businesses, the absence of a European language on shop signs may present potential legal risks.

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1   https://www.comune.milano.it/en/aree-tematiche/impresa/fare-pubblicita

Defining research area

This study investigates the linguistic landscape of Via Paolo Sarpi, a district known for its significant Chinese demographic and commercial influence. As a comparison,some data will be selected to be analyzed with the ChinaTown zone in Milan, based on official demographic and geographic data defining Milan's Chinatown boundaries.

Via Paolo Sarpi (Milan) is a quintessential Chinese ethnic enclave, validated by its demographic concentration, cultural institutions, and economic specialization. Over 20% of its residents are ethnically Chinese (Milan Census, 2020), with 300+ Chinese-owned businesses dominating its

Fig. 2.7 Boundary of Milan's Chinatown.

commercial landscape, including wholesale textiles and bilingual signage (78% in Chinese; Backhaus 2007, 45)[1]. Annual Lunar New Year celebrations and Buddhist temples reinforce cultural identity, while scholars like (Ceccagno 2003, 78; Colombi 2018, 102) highlight its role as a transnational hub linking Italy to Chinese trade networks. This convergence of demographic density, economic clout, and cultural preservation makes Sarpi a critical case study for analyzing ethnic enclaves' spatial and sociolinguistic dynamics.

To ensure objectivity, the analysis begins with a general survey of the street's shop sigsn, categorizing all observed shop signs based on their language composition.

Data collection

This study encompasses the entire range of Chinese-owned stores within the area defined as Milan's Chinatown. The research focuses on storefront shop signs and menus. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, four distinct data collection methods were employed, each addressing different aspects of the research scope through varied tools and applications:

Method 1: Digital Camera Photoshoot (Field Data Collection) – Conducted to capture real-world storefront signage and menus, providing direct visual evidence.

Method 2: Apify-Google Map Extender (Automated Digital Data Extraction) – Utilized to extract large-scale geotagged business information and establish an initial dataset of shop locations.

Method 3: Data Adaptation from Existing Sources – Integrated secondary data, including historical records, business directories, and prior research, to supplement and contextualize findings.

Method 4: Street-Level Verification via Google Earth and Cross-Referencing – Employed to manually verify shop names, validate signage accuracy, and cross-check digital data with real-world observations.

This four different data collection methods to examine the linguistic landscape of Chinatown. Each method serves a specific purpose and provides different types of information that contribute to the overall analysis o table 2.6 below outlines what data is collected, why it matters, and how it helps in understanding language use in the area.

Table 2.6 Methods Comparison

Method	Data collected	Why it matters
Digital camera Photoshoot	shopsigns packaging menus	Provides direct linguistic evidence
Google Map Extraction	Business names geotagged locations	Enables large-scale linguistic mapping
Street-Level Verification via Google Earth and Cross-Referencing	Physical shop sign names	Cross check the accuracy of shop sign name

METHOD 1: DIGITAL CAMERA PHOTOSHOOT (FIELD DATA COLLECTION).

A portion of the data used in this study was collected through photographs and videos captured using my camera. The visual data specifically document the linguistic landscape of Via Paolo Sarpi, with all images and footage taken within chineat[1] (a food store located in Via paolo Sarpi). ensuring a consistent spatial and contextual framework for analysis.

METHOD 2: APIFY-GOOGLE MAP EXTENDER (AUTOMATED DIGITAL DATA EXTRACTION).

Google Map extender provides multiple way ways to customize the dating extracting area ,to better specify the area ,the "circle "and multi polygon have been used in this research .

The key difference between the two methods lies in their data extraction approach: the circle method (Fig.2.10) extracts data by setting a radius around a central point, whereas the polygon method (FIG.2.11) defines specific coordinate points on the map to establish the study area.
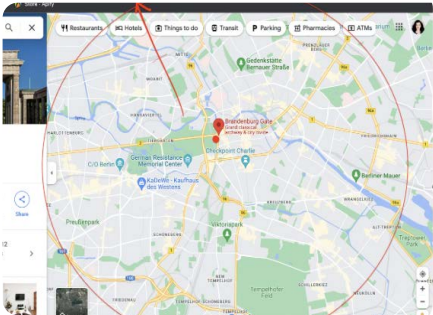
Fig. 2.10 radius method.
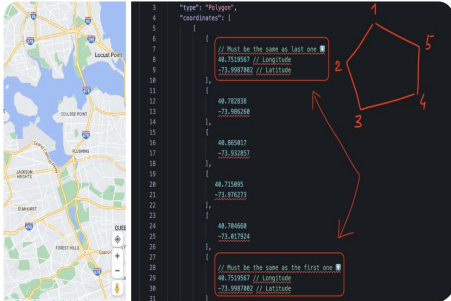
Fig. 2.11 coordinate method.

To ensure consistency in influencing factors, the search ranges have been standardized across both methods, See the Table 2.2 for details. Table 2.2, Table 2.3, and Table 2.4 provide detailed business names and addresses identified using the two extraction techniques. The circle method produces a larger dataset, including businesses beyond Chinatown's core, while the polygon method focuses on the most relevant commercial streets. Although the polygon method offers greater localization precision, it only captured 15 results within the same search range, which significantly differs from the dataset obtained through Street-Level Verification via Google Earth and Cross-Referencing (Method 4). described below. Therefore, the data from the polygon method will not be considered within the scope of this study. Instead, the circle method will serve as a supplementary dataset for the broader (Chinatown) area.

1   chineat, a food store in Milan Chinat. https://www.instagram.com/chineat.

TABLE 2.2 DATA INPUT IN APIFY.

methods	Circle	Polygon
Search terms	ristorante cinese,chinese,cucina cinese ,中餐,中国,cinese,ristorante	ristorante cinese,chinese,cucina cinese ,中餐,中国,cinese,ristorante
Custom search area	a 5 km radius around coordinates (9.176499, 45.481405).	a defined multi-point area covering key locations in via paolo sarpi.

TABLE 2.3 EXPANDED RESULTS FOR CIRCLE METHOD.

SHOP NAMES
JU XIN LOU
YUANKUNG
FU BAO
TAO SUSHI & DIMSUM
XI'AN · LORETO
LE NOVE SCODELLE(
(PARTIAL DATASET. 269 RESULTS REMAINING. FULL TABLE

TABLE 2.4 EXPANDED RESULTS FOR CIRCLE POLYGON

SHOP NAMES
聚宾点心店 米兰X
IAO HUTON
GI SAPORI DI SHANGHAI
君泰早餐店 JUNTAI COLAZIONE
JUBINHICHATEAU
DUFAN
RAVIOLERIA SARPIDA
ZHONGLITTLE LAMB
SARPINOODLES & SOUPSCROWN
绝味鸭脖
LONG CHANG
YUEBINLOU
GOLD BAO

To ensure accuracy, this study conducted a detailed manual verification process, cross-referencing business names on Google Maps with real-world shop signs observed through Google Earth street-view imagery and online search results. This step was necessary as Google Maps listings sometimes differed from actual physical shop signs. Additionally, real-world photographs taken in the first data collection phase were used to compile a verified list of physical storefront names for businesses along Via Paolo Sarpi. This method ensured that the dataset was specifically focused on shop signs rather than online business listings.

Fig. 2.13 workflow.

Data Collection

CHATGTP

ChatGPT Queries

"Shops info based on Paolo Sarpi"

89 results

CROSS CHECK

GOOGLE MAP

Missing Shops — Mistakes

Adding — Deleting

30 shops → 128shops ← 10shops

SUPPLEMENT

social — business websites — Google

48 corrections

Mistakes
Errori

CHABDAIDAO → 茶百道

Google Name — Physical shop signs

FINAL VALIDATION

DATASET

NAME ON GOOGLE	PHYSICAL NAME
金涌.Jinyong.risto–rante.CINESE	JINYONG
...	...

180 corrections

HOW TO READ ——— WORKFLOW ——— SOFTWARE

STEPS

Analysis Framework for the Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown and Paolo Sarpi

This study follows a progressive narrowing approach to examine the linguistic landscape of Milan's Chinatown and the Paolo Sarpi district. The process consists of three main steps:

1. Linguistic Landscape Distribution in Chinatown vs. Via Paolo Sarpi

The study begins with a broad analysis of the entire Chinatown area, systematically mapping all commercial shop signs within the district. This step includes businesses with and without visible Chinese linguistic elements to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall linguistic landscape.

To ensure a structured classification, shop signs in this phase are categorized into three groups: CLS, CONS, and GLL (see Table 15 for details).

TABLE 2.7 TYPOLOGY OF SHOP SIGNS: CLS, CONS, AND GLL

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
CLS	Shop signs that visibly incorporate Chinese characters
CONS	Chinese-owned shops without Chinese Characters.(This category is identified based on the Chinese language structure(PinYin) or Chinese signs on windows or glass by site surveys or map inspections.
GLL	Shops that neither display Chinese characters nor are identified as Chinese-owned.

2. Bilingual vs. Monolingual Shop Signs in Milan's Chinatown

The focus is then narrowed to Via Paolo Sarpi, the core commercial street of Milan's Chinatown. In this step, shop signs categorized as GLL are excluded from further analysis to focus specifically on the role of Chinese linguistic elements in commercial shop sign. This decision is based on the following factors:

The GLL category represents a large, diverse set of shops that do not contribute directly to the Chinese linguistic landscape, making them less relevant to the study's primary research focus.

Spatial analysis reveals that a significant proportion of GLL shops are located at the entrance of Via Paolo Sarpi, an area less integrated into the main commercial zone of Chinatown.

Excluding GLL signs allows the study to focus specifically on the linguistic strategies by Chinese-owned businesses. The remaining dataset consists of CLS and CONS shop signs. This refined dataset enables a more precise examination of how linguistic identity is presented within Chinatown's commercial core.

Within the Paolo Sarpi dataset, shop signs categorized as CLS and CONS are further analyzed based on their linguistic composition. The classification focuses on two key groups: (1) Solo-lingual shop signs, which exclusively use Chinese characters; (2) Bilingual shop signs, which incorporate Chinese alongside another language (e.g., Italian, English, or other hybrid elements). the detail could be seen in Table 2.8.

TABLE 2.8 BILINGUAL AND MONO-LINGUAL SHOP SIGN CATEGORY

SOLO-LINGUAL	Bi-LINGUAL
CN	CN+IT
OTHERS	CN+OTHER LANGUAGES
	CN+OTHERS

3. Categorization of Chinese-Identified Shops

Beyond the primary categorization of solo-lingual and bilingual shop signs, this step further examines the "Other" classification, which captures linguistic hybridization and phonetic adaptations within shop signs. will be further detailed in the following chapters.

TABLE 2.9 TYPOLOGY OF "OTHERS" SHOP SIGN NAMING STRATEGIES

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES	DESCRIPTION
PINYIN-BASED NAMING	HANZHIYI chabaidao	Direct transliteration using Pinyin without changing meaning.
PHONETIC-SEMANTIC ADAPTATION	CHAWON Baseus	Keeps pronunciation similar while adding meaningful Chinese characters.
LETTER-SYMBOL HYBRID	KUAFOOD Tang gourment	Mixes Latin letters and Chinese characters for a unique branding identity.

Linguistic Landscape Distribution in Via Paolo Sarpi

The analysis of shop signs in Paolo Sarpi Area includes CLS (Chinese-Language Shop Signs), CONS (Chinese-Owned Non-Chinese Shop Signs), and GLL (General Linguistic Landscape), provided a comprehensive overview of the linguistic environment in the district. We can draw some significant conclusion from the linguistic dominance, cultural identity, and market adaptations within this ethnic enclave.

The data reveals a higher percentage of CLS shop signs in Via Paolo Sarpi (72.46%) .

Via Paolo Sarpi serves as the linguistic core of Chinatown, where the use of Chinese characters in signage is more concentrated.

A stronger cultural and economic presence of Chinese businesses is maintained in this area, reinforcing its role as a self-sustaining ethnic enclave.

The relatively lower presence of non-Chinese linguistic elements suggests that businesses in this area primarily target Chinese-speaking consumers, whether they be residents, tourists, or business owners.

TABLE 2.10 DISTRIBUTION OF SHOP SIGNS BY LANGUAGE CATEGORIES IN PAOLO SARPI ZONE.			
CATEGORIES	● CLS	● CONS	● GLL	ALL
PAOLO SARPI	90	16	73	179

These findings highlight multiple dynamics at play in the area:

-Preserva*tion vs. Adaptation*: The high CLS concentration in Via Paolo Sarpi suggests a stronghold for cultural preservation, whereas the presence of CONS and GLL signs indicates a trend towards adaptation and integration into Milan's mainstream economy.

-A Linguistic and Economic Duality: Via Paolo Sarpi is evolving not just as a cultural enclave but also as a diversiinesses into the broader Milanese economy. CONS shop signs represent a smaller proportion of the total, reinforcing the area's role as a stronghold of Chinese linguistic and cultural identity.

The presence of CONS businesses indicates a strategic linguistic adaptation. Some Chinese entrepreneurs deliberately avoid using Chinese characters in their shop signs to appeal to non-Chinese consumers. These businesses are often found in sectors of business hub, where language choices in shop signs reflect deeper socio-economic strategies.

This linguistic duality underscores the ongoing negotiation between ethnic identity and globalization, shaping the future trajectory of Milan's Chinatown.
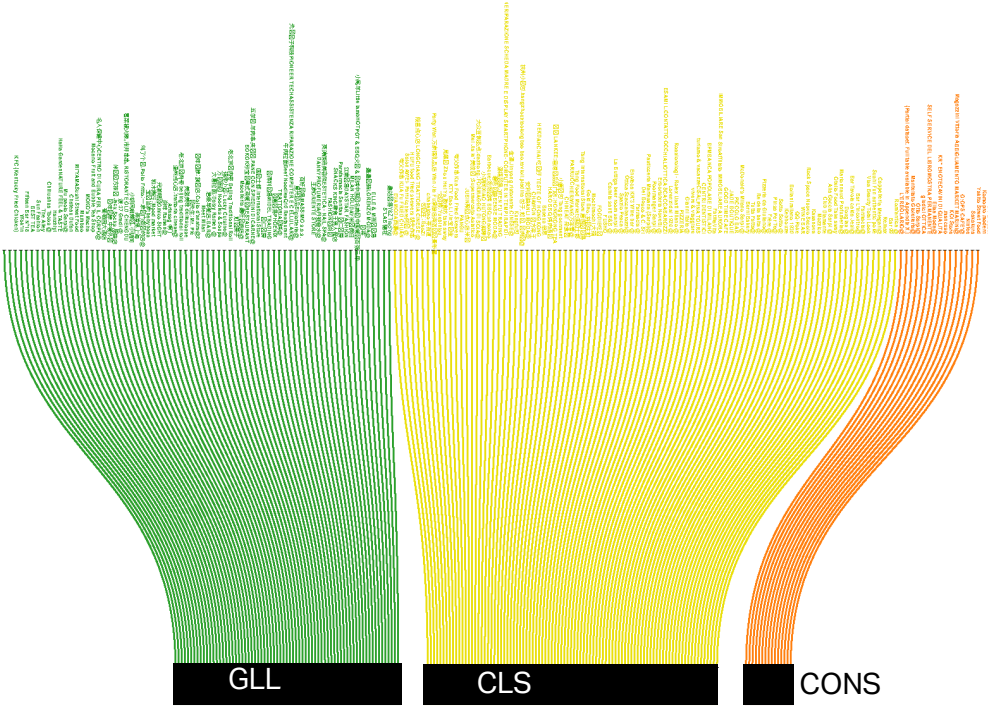
Bilingual vs. Monolingual Shop Signs in Milan's Chinatown

In Milan's Chinatown, excluding GLL, the dataset comprises 106 shops. Among them, bilingual (BI) shop signs account for 94 stores, while monolingual (MONO) shop signs total 13.

DOMINANCE OF BILINGUAL SHOP SIGNS

A comparative analysis of BI and MONO shop signs reveals a notable disparity—bilingual shop signs are 7.2 times more prevalent than monolingual ones. This pattern suggests that within ethnic enclaves and Chinese-identified businesses, bilingual shop signs remain the predominant choice, likely as a strategy to accommodate both Chinese-speaking customers and the broader Milanese market.

However, the presence of 13 monolingual shops (accounting for 12.3% of the analyzed dataset) raises several critical questions:

(?) *What linguistic features characterize these MONO shop signs?*
(?) *What factors influence business owners to opt for a single language rather than bilingual signage?*

These questions will be further examined in the subsequent section on monolingual shop signs.

The linguistic landscape of Chinatown is predominantly shaped by bilingual shop signs. However, Italian is not the primary secondary language; instead, English and hybrid elements appear more prevalent.

Monolingual shop signs are comparatively rare. When they do appear, they tend to be associated with businesses prioritizing international visibility over local Italian engagement. This observation leads to a fundamental inquiry:

(?) *Are secondary languages (e.g., English, hybrid elements) in bilingual shop signs used as translations or as phonetic adaptations of Chinese names?*
(?) *If they serve as translations, do they primarily convey phonetics or semantics?*
(?) *In an Italian-speaking environment, why is Italian not the dominant secondary language in bilingual shop signs?*

The following section will provide a detailed linguistic breakdown of BI and MONO shop sign trends.

Fig. 2.17 Bi-Lingual and Mono-Lingual Shop Distribution.
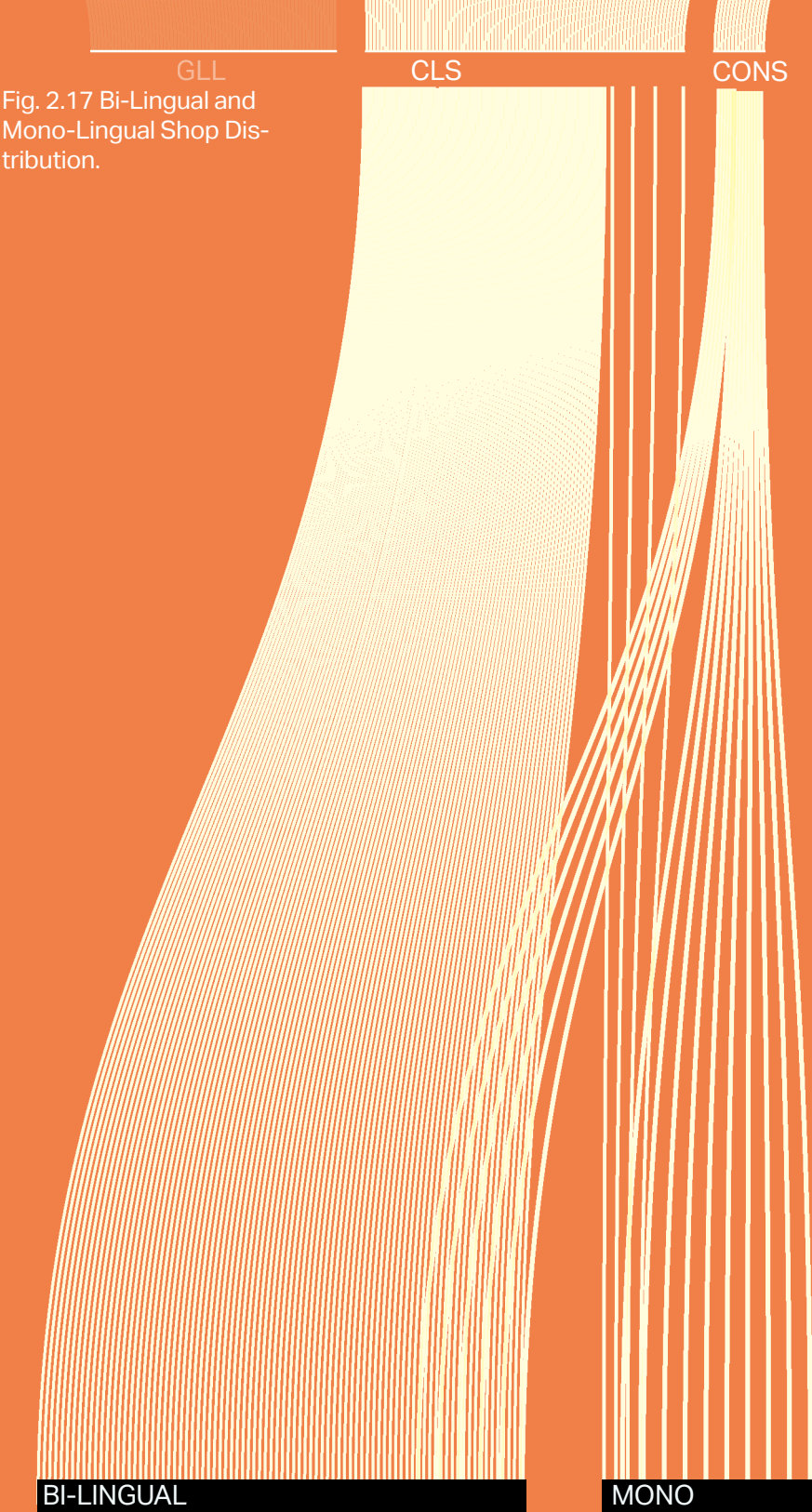
Language Composition in Bilingual Shop Signs

Within the 94 bilingual shop signs, the language combinations are as follows:

CONTAINS ITALIAN : 29 shops (30.9%)

CONTAINS OTHER LANGUAGE: (excluding Italian): 28 shops (29.8%)

CONTAINS OTHER LIGUISTIC ELEMENTS: (hybrid naming elements): 37 shops (39.4%)

These field data were visualized in 2025(see Fig. 2.18).

An unexpected pattern emerges in the analysis of Italian usage within bilingual shop signs:

Italian appears in only 30.9% of BI shop signs, making it the least used language in bilingual signs, Other languages (e.g., English) appear in 29.8%of BI shop signs. Other linguistic elements (e.g., Pin-yin based naming, phonetic, or symbolic names) are the most prevalent at 39.4%.

This result is unexpected given that Milan's Chinatown is embedded within an Italian-speaking city. Several potential explanations arise:

•*International Appeal & Tourist Influence*

Many businesses, particularly within the food and beverage sector, demonstrate a preference for English over Italian, aiming to appeal to a broader customer base, including both international tourists and younger, second-generation Chinese residents.

For example, the businees in Sarpi area frequently use "trade" rather than the Italian "commercio " (figure 2.19). Similarly, some bubble tea shops prefer "food" over "cibo" (figure 2.20). This suggests a commercial strategy aimed at both international tourists and second-generation Chinese residents, who may be more accustomed to English.

Fig. 2.19 "WEN FU TRADING" Store.

Fig. 2.20 "KUAFOOD FRIED CHUAN" Store.

•*Demographic Shifts & Generational Changes*

Milan's Chinatown has a mix of long-established Chinese immigrants and newer generations who may have different linguistic preferences.

Older businesses may have prioritized Italian, but newer businesses could be reflecting a shift toward globalized branding, incorporating more English or hybrid elements.

45

BI-LINGUAL

MONO

Fig. 2.18 Three Classifications Within Bi-Lingual Shop Numbers.

CONTAINS OTEHRS

CONTAINS OTHERS LANGUAGES

CONTAINS ITALIAN
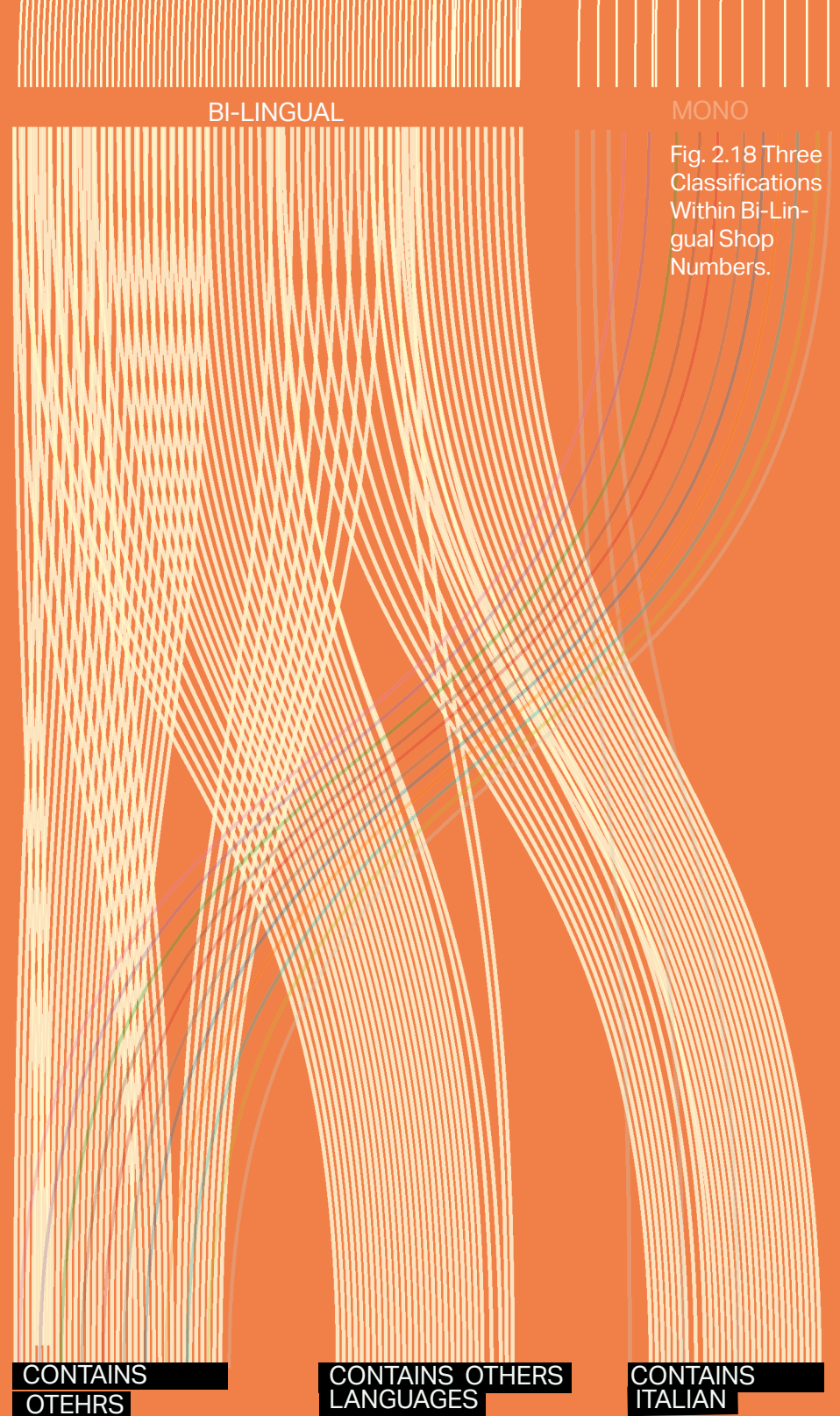
Language Composition in Monolingual (MONO) Shop Signs

Among the 13 MONO shop signs, the language breakdown is:
CHINESE ONLY (CN): 3 shops (23.1%)
OTHERS (Other languages or other liguistic elements): 10 shops (76.9%)
Based on the data, it was found when Chinese business owners opt for a single language, they tend to choose widely recognizable or non-local linguistic elements.

This supports the argument that Chinese businesses, even when operating in a single language, prioritize visibility in a broader market rather than solely catering to Italian-speaking locals.

Fig. 2.21 Part of Shops collection of MONO-Lingual category.

BI-LINGUAL
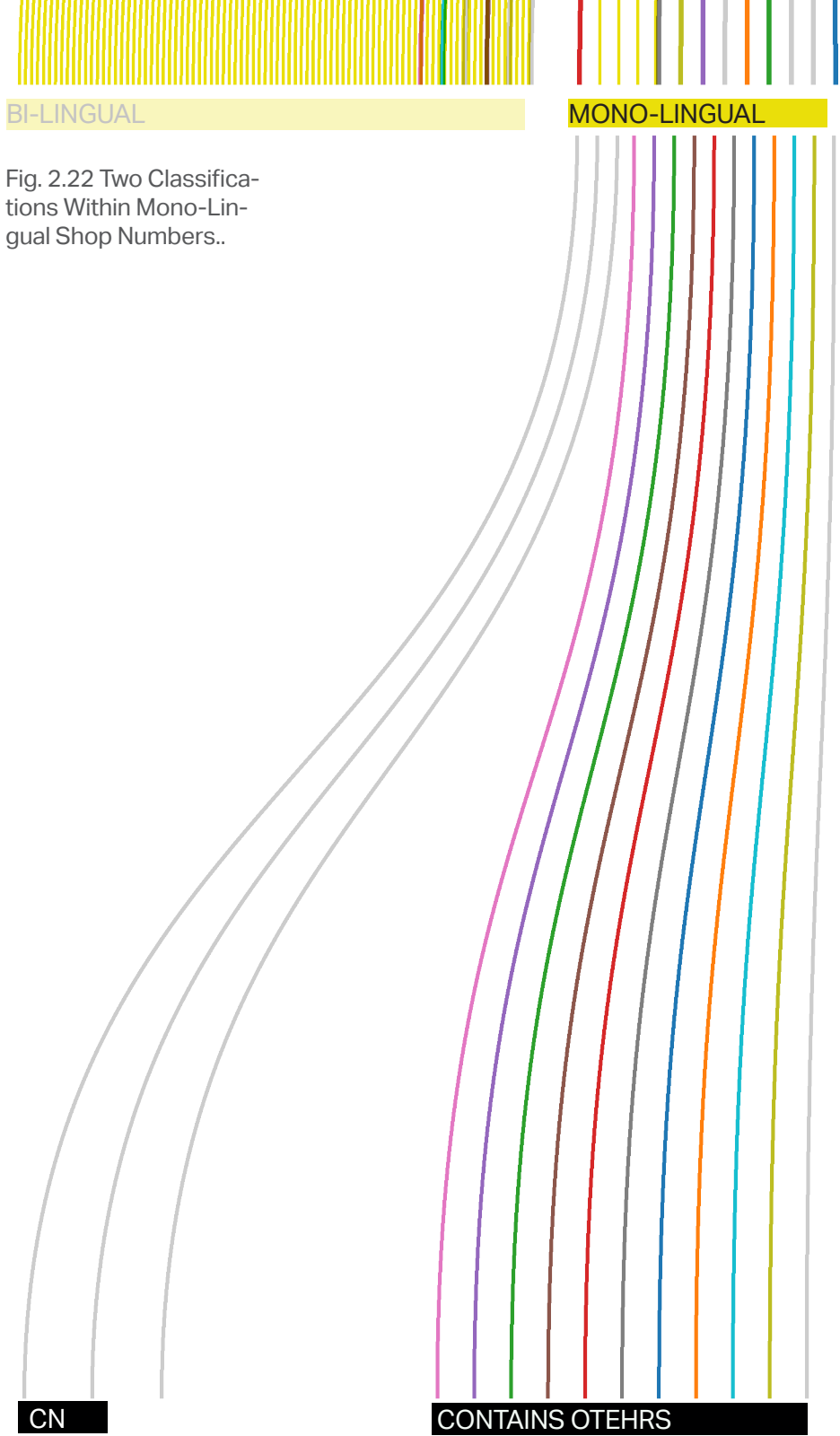
MONO-LINGUAL

Fig. 2.22 Two Classifications Within Mono-Lingual Shop Numbers..

CN

CONTAINS OTEHRS

Refining the Categorization of Chinese-Identified Shops: Other's Adaptation

TABLE 2.11 STATISTICAL DISTRIBUTION OF "OTHERS" NAMING STRATEGIES			
	Pinyin-Based Naming	Phonetic-Semantic Adaption	Letter-Symbol Hybrid
Bi-Lingual	28	7	9
Mono-Lingual	1	2	2

From the previous data analysis, the"CONTAINS OTHER LIGUISTIC ELEMENTS" category accounts for 37 out of 94 bilingual shop signs, making it the most prevalent category. Meanwhile, "CONTAINS ITALIAN" has the lowest representation.

To further investigate this imbalance, this section categorizes "Others" into distinct linguistic strategies (Table 2. 9), with corresponding statistical data presented in Table 2.11:

Pinyin-Based Naming: 28 cases

Letter-Symbol Hybrid: 9 cases

Phonetic Adaptation: 7 cases

The data suggests that among bilingual shop signs, Pinyin-based naming is the most frequently used secondary linguistic strategy, while Italian appears less often. raising the question:

(?) *Why is Pinyin-based naming more common than Italian in shop signs?*

Several factors contribute to this pattern, leading the author to make the following inferences.

• *Pinyin-Based Naming as a Semiotic and Cultural Marker*

Pinyin serves as a bridge between Chinese pronunciation and global linguistic systems, allowing Chinese shop names to be more accessible without fully translating them.

Unlike direct translation into Italian, Pinyin approximates the phonetic identity of the original Chinese name, aiding in brand recognition and cultural authenticity.

Pinyin reinforces cultural identity and perceived authenticity, making

1.Pinyin is the romanization system for Mandarin Chinese, using the Latin alphabet to represent Chinese character pronunciation. It is essential for learning and typing Chinese.

CONTAINS OTEHRS
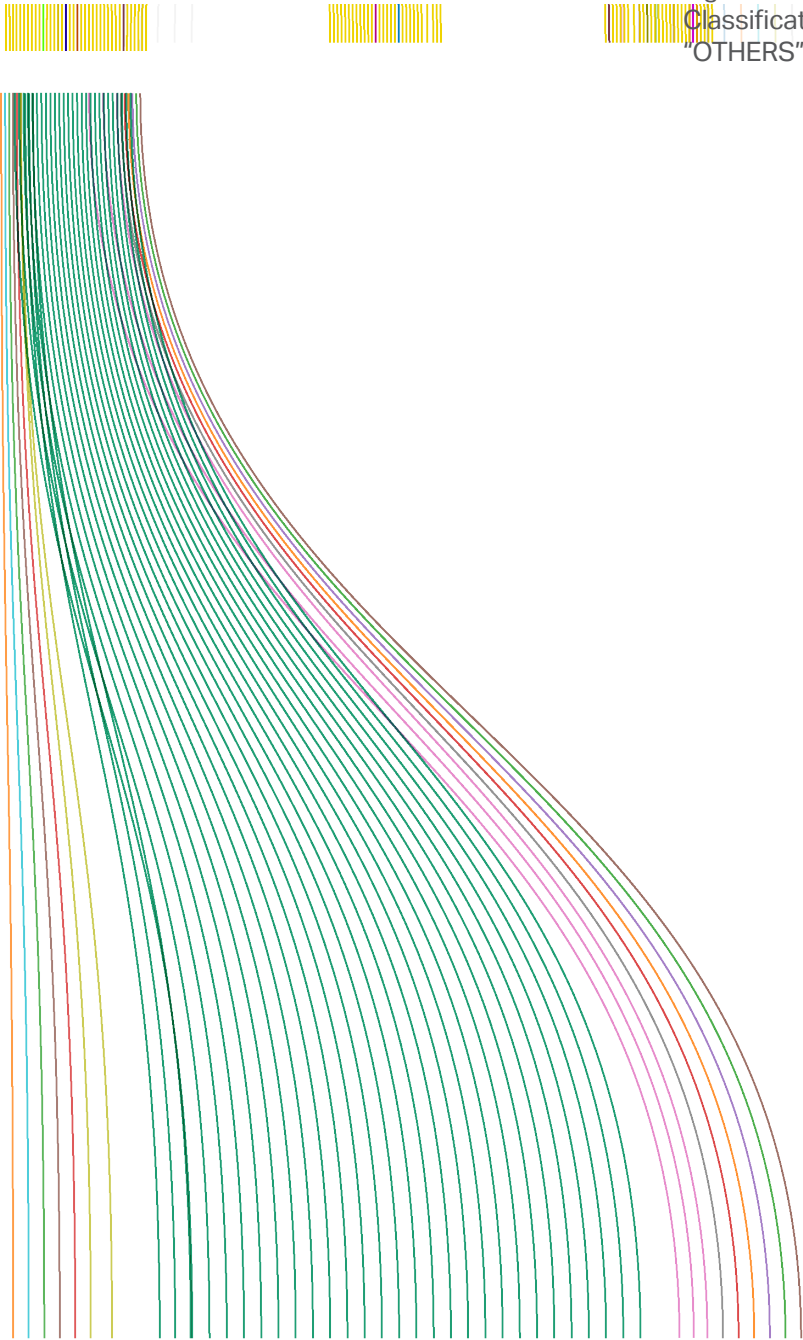
Fig. 2.23 Three Classifications Within "OTHERS" (BI).

PHONETIC   PINYIN-BASED NAMING   LETTER-SYMBO LHYBRID

businesses more recognizable to both Chinese-speaking and international audiences.

• *Target Audience Considerations*

Based on the analyzed dataset, a significant portion of businesses in Chinatown cater primarily to a transnational Chinese-speaking audience rather than solely integrating into the local Italian market.

English or globally recognizable transliterations (such as those in Pinyin) serve as a more effective branding tool than an Italian translation, which may not resonate with the intended consumer base.

Businesses using Hybrid Letter Combinations or Phonetic Adaptations strategically blend different linguistic elements to create unique and memorable shop signs while maintaining their Chinese identity.

• Economic and Branding Factors:

Pinyin allows businesses to differentiate themselves within the ethnic enclave market, appealing to both Chinese-speaking consumers and non-Chinese speakers familiar with global Chinese brands.

Italian translations may sometimes fail to convey the cultural or symbolic meaning embedded in Chinese names, making Pinyin a more flexible and effective choice.

• The Semiotic Function of Pinyin-Based Naming

Pinyin-based naming in Chinatown's shop signs does more than simply transliterate Chinese words—it acts as a cultural and semiotic tool. By maintaining phonetic links to the original Chinese names, it helps preserve cultural identity while enabling accessibility in a multilingual commercial landscape. The prevalence of "OTHERS", particularly Pinyin-based names, suggests a strategic balance between cultural preservation and global market adaptation.

This analysis raises further questions: To what extent does Pinyin function as a symbolic reference rather than a practical language tool? Does its use shape consumer perceptions of authenticity in ethnic enclaves? These aspects will be explored in the following sections.

Fig. 2.24 Three Classifications Within "OTHERS" (MONO).

OTEHRS

PHONETIC

PINYIN-BASED NAMING

LETTER-SYMBOL HYBRID
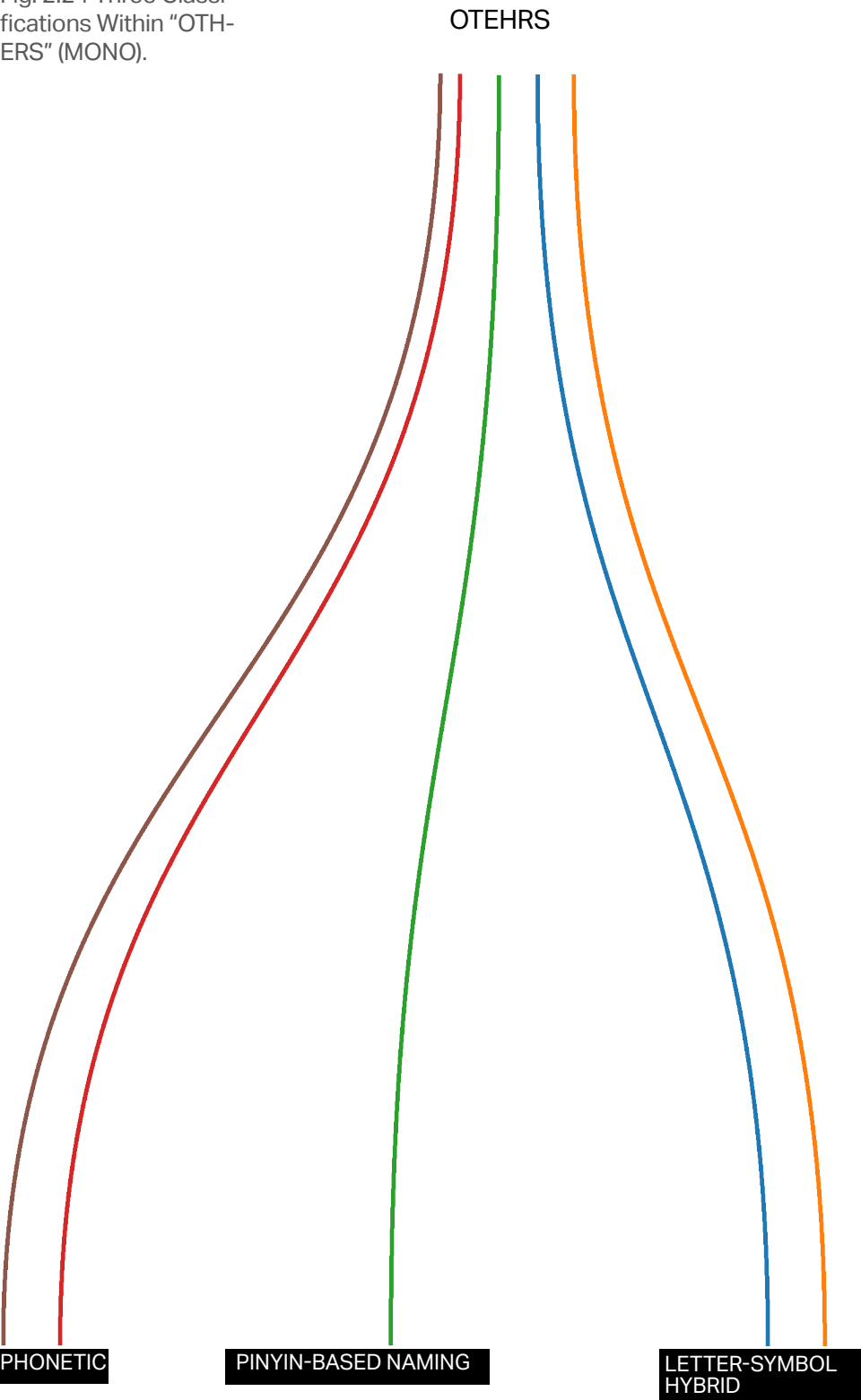
Expansion of Language Choice Analysis: Menus

While the primary analysis of language choice in Chinatown focuses on shop signs through a comprehensive dataset covering the entire district, this study also extends the investigation to menus to further explore linguistic representation in commercial communication.

Unlike the systematic survey conducted on shop signs, the examination of menus does not encompass the entire Chinatown district. Instead, a selective approach was applied, focusing on businesses that had already appeared in the Language Choice Data section. These businesses were chosen based on their linguistic relevance and their role in shaping consumer interactions through written communication beyond shop signs.

ANALYSIS OF BILINGUAL MENUS IN PAOLO SARPI

This section examines seven restaurant menus photographed along the main street of Paolo Sarpi, all of which were posted outside the storefronts. To maintain consistency with our shop sign analysis, a similar approach is applied here.

Unlike shop signage, where linguistic variation is more pronounced, all the menus in the dataset consistently feature bilingual information. Notably, 100% of the investigated menus include Italian translations for every dish, indicating a strong adaptation to the local linguistic environment.

However, a pinyin-based naming strategy is observed in Shanghai Wonton (Wanton di Shanghai / Shanghai Wonton) and Spaghetti con pollo e intestino di maiale, where the geographic origin ("Shanghai") and certain

Fig. 2.25 Menu Representation in Paolo Sarpi's Chinatown.

dish names retain their Chinese phonetic representation. This suggests a deliberate linguistic choice to preserve authenticity while maintaining accessibility for non-Chinese speakers.

These findings highlight a functional distinction between shop signs and menus—while shop signs reflect branding and business identity, menus serve a direct communicative purpose, necessitating clear and comprehensive translation for customer understanding. The universal

presence of Italian translations in menus reinforces the practical necessity of linguistic adaptation in daily commerce within Milan's Chinatown.

TABLE 2.12 LINGUISTIC CATEGORIZATION OF BILINGUAL MENUS IN PAOLO SARPI

🟡 Italian 　　　　　🔴 Pinyin-based Naming 　　　　　🟢 Chinese

INDEX	IMAGE	INFO ON MENU
Fig. 1 Menu A		🟡🔴 上海馄饨 (Wanton di Shanghai / Shanghai wonton) 🟢 香辣猪肚鸡面 (Spaghetti con pollo e intestino di maiale (piccante o non piccante))
Fig. 2 Menu B		🟡 炸鱿鱼圈 (Calamari Fritti / Fried calamari)
Fig. 3 Menu C		🟡🔴 蒸馒头（2个）(Pane cinese al vapore 2 pezzi) 蒸饺（8个）(Ravioli al vapore 8pz (carne di maiale))
Fig. 4 Menu D		🟡🔴 猪肉/素饺子 (Ravioli di maiale/vegetariani) 小笼包 (Xiao Long Bao) 章鱼小丸子 (Polpette di polpo)
Fig. 5 Menu E		🟡🔴 传统大烧饼梅干菜大饼 (Piadina con mei gan cai) 葱油飘香大饼 (Piadina al sapore di cipolla) 芝麻白糖大饼 (Piadina con sesame e zucchero)
Fig. 6 Menu F		🟡🔴 盖饭 (Riso Coperto) 炒饭 (Riso Saltato)

2.2.2. 2 CODE PREFERNECE

The placement and styling of Chinese characters in shop signs, as observed in Figures 2.26 and 2.27, suggest a prioritization of linguistic visibility. In many cases, Chinese text is positioned more prominently than other languages, either through size, placement, or distinctive typographic features such as bold strokes, illuminated effects, or contrasting colors. This strategic emphasis on Chinese characters may indicate an effort to reinforce cultural identity and establish a stronger connection with a Chinese-speaking audience.

For instance, Figure 2.26 showcases a shop sign where the Chinese characters "龙昌饭店" (Long Chang Restaurant) are displayed in bright red below the Italian text "Trattoria Cinese". The use of red, a culturally significant color in Chinese tradition, along with a clear, bold typeface, makes the Chinese text stand out despite its smaller size. This suggests an intentional effort to maintain visibility for both local and Chinese-speaking customers, while still emphasizing the restaurant's cultural identity.

Similarly, Figure 2.27 presents multiple examples of shop signs where Chinese characters dominate the visual hierarchy. The sign for "Mr. Wu" prominently features large Chinese characters, with the English and Italian translations appearing in smaller fonts below. The "Shanghai" sign uses illuminated yellow Chinese characters against a dark background, making them visually striking and instantly recognizable, whereas the English transliteration is comparatively smaller and less emphasized. Another example, "Lucky Cuisine", features stylized Chinese calligraphy in a glowing red-orange hue, reinforcing an aesthetic association with traditional Chinese culture while maintaining a bilingual presence.

Fig. 2.27 Shops with Enlarged Chinese Characters.

These examples illustrate different strategies for integrating Chinese characters into bilingual signage. Some businesses opt for enlarged Chinese text to attract attention, while others use color contrast or illuminated effects to highlight linguistic identity. This pattern aligns with broader discussions in linguistic landscape studies, where dominant language visibility often reflects cultural and economic positioning. In the case of Milan Chinatown, the prominence of Chinese characters in shop signage underscores both the historical presence of the Chinese community and the commercial advantage of catering to Chinese-speaking customers.

Fig. 2.26 Shops with Highlighted Chinese Characters.

2.2.2.3 VISUAL SYMBLES ANALYSIS

Fig. 2.28 Visual Distribution of Shop Signs in Milan's Chinatown.

Fig. 6. The different categories of stores were visually marked with different colors on a map of the Milan Chinatown area.

- Background color: black 28% (9), white 25% (8), green 16% (5), red 16% (5), brown 13% (4), yellow 2% (1);
- Font colors: white 59% (19), black 19% (6), yellow 16% (5), red 6% (2);

Cultural factors:
- Chinese characteristic patterns - Ruyi pattern, Chinese knot style pattern;
- Animals - deer, panda, bear (in chef's clothes), chicken, cat, duck;
- Characters - traditional Chinese chef image (white suit), cartoon version of chef image (chef's hat), cartoon version of koufu;
- Food - buns, hot pot, barbecue, noodles (bowl), red beans, milk tea;
- Tools and others - chopsticks, fire, wheat, landscape (ink style);

Milan Chinatown- Text-only group image of a total of 28 restaurants (see Fig. 8). Color and size (%):
- Background color: black 36% (30), white 7% (2), green 22% (6), red 22% (6), brown 7% (2), yellow 3% (1), pink 3% (1).
- Font colors: white 43% (12), black 11% (3), yellow 25% (7), red 14% (4), blue 7% (2);

Cultural factors:
- Typeface morphology - Chinese brush lettering;

Italian restaurant - Text combination images for a total of 24 restaurants (see Fig. 9). Color and size (%):
- Background color: black 33% (8), white 13% (3), red 17% (4), brown 17% (4), yellow 3.5% (1), blue 3.5% (1), green 13% (3);
- Font colors: white 38% (9), black 16% (4), yellow 8% (2), red 33% (8), orange 5% (1);

This section is based on the Geographical Semiotics Framework, incorporating the visual symbols of Chinatown (excluding text) into the analysis.

The data in this section is referenced from AI Tools to Enhance Cultural Identity in Traditional Visual Communication: A Case Study of Milan Chinatown by Xinxi Liu and Yuan Liu (2024). Based on the data collected in the article (pp. 301–303; see Fig. 2.28), including background color, font color, cultural patterns, animal representation, food representation, and tools & others. Detailed data can be found in Table 2.13.

Conclusion

The high percentage of black and white backgrounds in Chinatown's shop signs may indicate a modernized aesthetic approach while still maintaining elements of traditional Chinese cultural representation through specific colors and symbols.

The dominance of white fonts suggests that readability and visibility are prioritized, especially given the frequent use of darker backgrounds.

The significant presence of Ruyi[1] patterns, food imagery, and symbolic animals showcases how Milan's Chinatown businesses actively integrate cultural markers to create a distinctive ethnic commercial identity.

The limited use of Italian design motifs in comparison to Chinese cultural references may indicate that Chinatown remains a self-contained cultural and economic enclave, despite its location within Milan.

TABLE 2.13 VISUAL AND SEMIOTIC FEATURES OF SHOP SIGNS IN MILAN CHINATOWN
SHOP NAMES
*TITLE*毛灶·串串火锅 *MAO HOTPOT*
东北饺子 *RAVIOLI NORDEST*
艺家小吃店 *YIJIA RISTORANTE*
鑫海酒店 *MARE D' ORO RISTORANTE CINESE*美福熟食外卖
ROSTICCERIA MEIFU TAKE AWAY IT+CN+ENPIZZERIA DA MIMMO
PIZZA AL THANICOSOTTO SOTTO CUCINA IN
CANTINAKEBHOUZE(PARTIAL DATASET. FULL TABLE AVAILABLE IN
APPENDIX X.)
*CHABAIDAO*茶百道
叫了个鸡 *POLLO FRITTO*
BAOZI 包鲜生
面面聚到 *MIANMIANJUDAO*
雲味馆 *RAMENAMANORESTRAUNT WANG JIAO MILAN*
后街 *RISTORANTE DI HOUJIE* 铁板烧 砂锅东北小菜 风味 *CHINESES*
FOODMR.TIME MILANO 麦田时光 烘焙蛋糕坊小胡同
XIAO HUTONG 麻辣烫
FUSHO
FRÈRE
PIZZERIA DA GIULIANO
MARTESANA
ZEN WEI
巴九門 老成都 串串香 *RESTRAUNT OLD CHENGDU*
RECREO BAR
...

2.3 CONCLUSION AND QUESTIONS

From the iconic archways in San Francisco Chinatown to the endless lantern arrays in Milan's Chinatown, from Los Angeles and San Francisco to Bangkok—are marked by ubiquitous red lanterns and paifang (decorative archways) erected as symbolic "Chinese gateways."

In 2014, Milan's Chinatown proposed constructing such an arch at its entrance, a plan later rejected after the Vivi Sarpi community[1] launched a petition. Local resident Luigi Renato told Deutsche Presse-Agentur: "Erecting Chinese symbols doesn't align with our demographic reality—85% of residents here are Italian." The paifang, with its vibrant colors and architecturally disjointed presence within commercial streetscapes, is often perceived by the public as an open invitation from the Chinese community. However, the author argues that these visual markers—perpetual red lanterns, annual lion dances, and proposed archways—not only reinforce cultural identity for local Chinese but simultaneously perpetuate self-orientalization.

Defining "the Orient" and "Self-Orientalization"

Before addressing Chinatowns' "self-orientalizing dilemma," we must first interrogate the constructed nature of "the Orient" itself. In Orientalism (1978), Edward Said deconstructs how Western academia and art historically fabricated the "Orient" as Europe's civilizational "Other"—a homogenized entity defined by exoticism, irrationality, and backwardness. Crucially, Said's analysis focuses on Western representations of Arab societies in the Middle East and North Africa, largely excluding East Asia from his primary critique. Said exposes how Orientalist discourse transforms observable details into immutable laws about "Oriental nature."

"To make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers." (Said, 1978: 86)

In Chapter III's section "Orient is an Imitation West," Said critiques how modern Orientalists pressure Eastern societies to adopt Western frameworks: "Orient is an imitation west... encouraging Easterners to judge themselves by Western criteria and to work for achieving Western goals."

Self-Orientalization in Chinatown Architecture

The concept of self-orientalization, derived from Said's framework, refers to non-Western communities actively internalizing and reproducing Orientalist stereotypes to align with Western expectations. As Rey Chow

(1993) observes in Writing Diaspora, diasporic cultural producers—from filmmakers to community planners—often accentuate "exotic" elements to satisfy Western aesthetic appetites. This dynamic manifests starkly in post-earthquake Chinatown reconstructions:

San Francisco's Chinatown (rebuilt after 1906) was consciously designed as a "theme park" to retain Chinese business taxes.

Los Angeles' Chinatown subsequently adopted this model, inspiring standardized archways in Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston.

The failed paifang proposal in Milan's Paolo Sarpi district reveals the same logic: whether motivated by cultural preservation or economic incentives, the Chinese community's strategy reinforces Orientalist imagery constructed through Western lenses. By voluntarily reproducing dragon motifs and crimson archways—despite the area's Italian majority—they engage in self-orientalization, a marginalized group internalizing and performing hegemonic stereotypes.

Based on the observed phenomena outlined above, this chapter raises the following questions:

⁇ Can cultural design in spaces like Milan's Paolo Sarpi transcend existing stereotypes?
⁇ Will endless reproductions of red lanterns and paifang reduce Chinatown cultural strategies to monolithic symbols?

These concerns resonate globally. Lebanese graphic designer Imad Gebrayel posed a parallel challenge in 2017: "When national identity itself is contested, how should designers represent it? Must we cling to folkloric clichés, or can we forge visual languages that acknowledge hybridity?"

The subsequent chapter will explore answers through design experimentation and innovative approaches.

1   Vivisarpi, "Petizione per la tutela e la valorizzazione di via Paolo Sarpi," Vivisarpi, ultimo accesso 13 marzo 2025, https://www.vivisarpi.it.
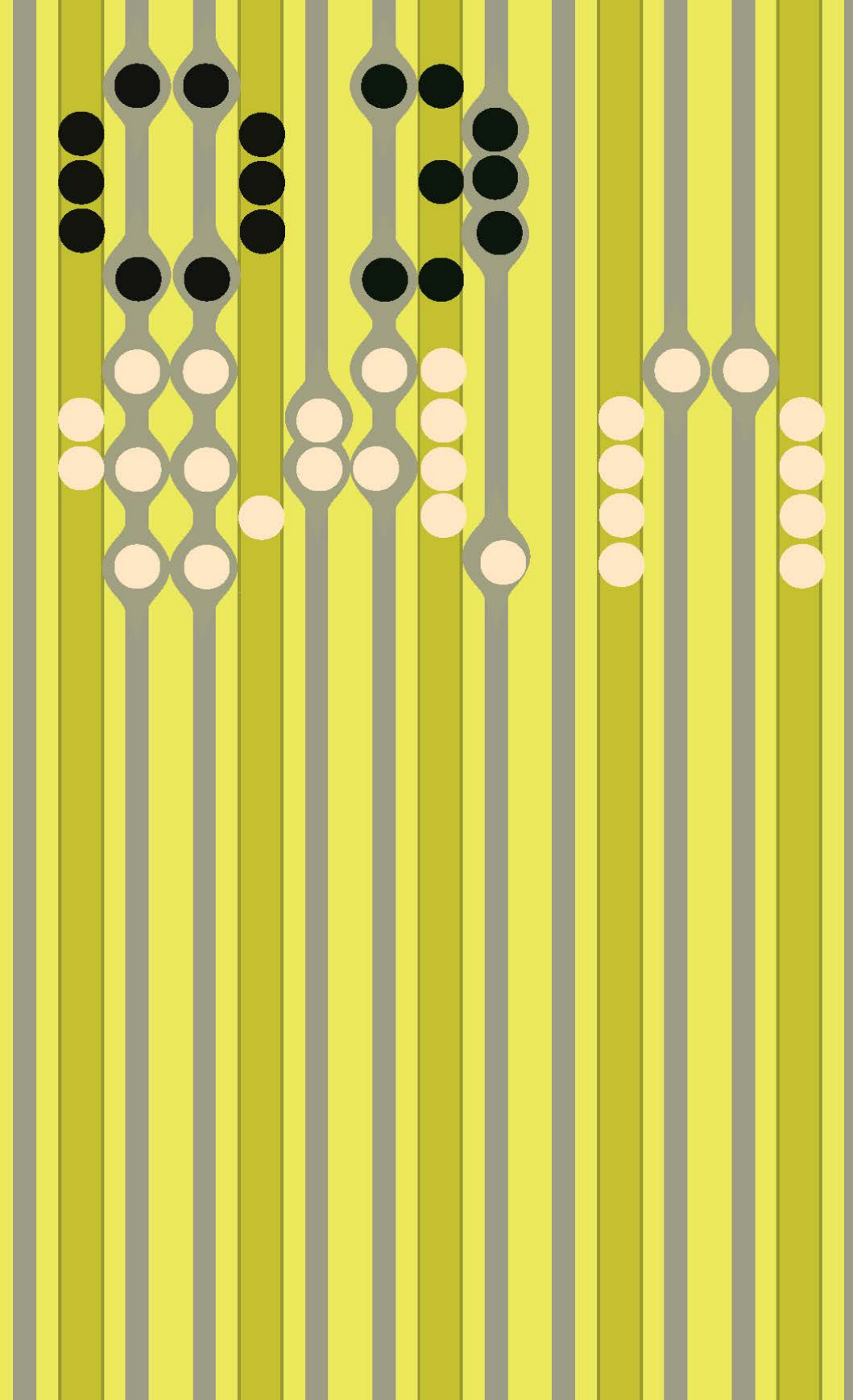
Cultural identity can be expressed through design in a myriad of ways, from reimagining local shop signs with cutting-edge AI to orchestrating grand visual themes for global events.

This analysis compares three distinct approaches: an AI-driven shop sign experiment at Milan Design Week 2024, the visual identity of Chinese cultural showcases (exemplified by the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Expo 2010 Shanghai), and dynamic cultural branding projects in contemporary design. We examine how each approach employs symbols, typography, color, and methodology to represent identity and the cultural implications therein. A comparative table summarizes key differences, followed by detailed case breakdowns and a synthesis of insights.

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3.1 CASE STUDIES

3.1.1 DESIGN CASE IN PAOLO SARPI

AI Tools in Enhancing Cultural Identity:

The study by Liu and Liu (2024) explores how AI-driven tools can revitalize the visual identity of Milan's Chinatown, which has gradually lost its distinctive Chinese cultural representation due to urban modernization (Figure 3.1) .The research suggests that the current visual communication landscape in Milan Chinatown may not fully reflect its ethnic identity, contributing to a perceived homogenization of urban space.

Fig. 3.1 .AI-generated
shop signs
Source:Liu & Liu, 2024.

TABLE 3.1. AI DESIGN GENERATION LOGIC TABLE LIU&LIU (2024).

Name of Restaurant (English)	Name of Restaurant (Chinese)	Introduction to the restaurant and geographic characteristics	AI Design Generation Logic	Indicators of cultural identity
Chabaidao	茶百道	Local tea drink chain brand in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China. Chengdu's characteristic cultural symbols such as the panda, Sichuan opera face painting, bamboo, etc..	- Create a banner for my food supplements store named "Chabaidao" with all kinds of Chinese tea, panda, and bamboo supplements. - Create a banner for my food supplements store named "Chabaidao" with all kinds of panda drinking bubble tea, and bamboo supplements.	Semiotic symbolism: panda, bamboo Symbolism of color: green
Mao hotpot	毛灶	Hot pot, mandarin duck hot pot, Manfrotto	- Hotpot logo design vector silhouette of yuanyang hotpot template illustration, illustration. - Hotpot logo design vector silhouette of yuanyang hotpot, Chopstick template illustration, illustration.	Semiotic symbolism: chopstick Symbolism of color: red, gold
Mo	凉皮肉夹馍	Tang Dynasty Chang a (now Xi'an) City, Terracotta warriors and Horses of Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum, and the art of paper cutting.	- A paper artwork of the terracotta warriors and horses eat cold skin and roujiamo, in the style of vibrant illustrations, typography, illustration, poster, ink wash painting. - Cold skin and roujiamo, lantern, in the style of vibrant illustrations, typography, illustration, poster, ink wash painting. - Roujiamo on the plate, Chopstick, lantern, in the style of vibrant illustrations, typography, illustration, poster, black and white ink painting.	Semiotic symbolism: Xi'an architecture, bowls, chopsticks Symbolism of color: red, yellow, blue, green
Tang Gourmet	小唐湯包	Jiangnan Snacks, Jiangnan Water, "Venice" of the East. Water Alley. Water on the bottle boat, The lotus pond, The moonlight, Jiangnan gardens.	- Vector art, logo, Simple and clean line art of nature with pond. And There are buns and chopsticks on the plate, illustration. - The word "white steamed stuffed bun" shaped like a white steamed stuffed bun, typography. - The word "white steamed stuffed bun" shaped like a Steamed Savory Buns, typography.	Semiotic symbolism: baozi, Jiangnan Garden architecture Symbolism of color: red, yellow, blue, green
Anatra Pechinese	北京烤鸭	Roast Duck, Quanjude (is the old cultural symbol of Beijing). Quanjude Roast Duck is one of the city famous signs of Beijing.	- Create a logo with the pattern Duck render, painting. - Create a logo with the pattern Yellow Duck render, painting. - Create a logo with the pattern Yellow Duck and Chinese knot render, painting.	Semiotic symbolism: Chinese knots, abstract patterns Symbolism of color: red, yellow, blue, green

To address this issue, the study adopts an AI-generated shop sign experiments, where digital tools were used to redesign storefronts, incorporating Chinese cultural symbols while adapting to Western aesthetics. The experiment involved:

- analyzing existing visual elements in Chinatown's shop signs (table 2.13) .

-generating new AI-assisted shop sign concepts that integrate culturally relevant motifs such as calligraphic strokes, Chinese red and gold color schemes, and traditional patterns.

- Surveying public perception, where native Italians and non-Chinese respondents evaluated the extent to which the redesigned signs reflected authentic Chinese cultural identity (Table 3.1).

The study concludes that while AI-assisted tools can enhance cultural representation, their application must be carefully curated to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or producing overly uniform representations. Moreover, visual semiotics and public engagement play a crucial role in determining whether these redesigned signs successfully communicate cultural identity.

Noi Men: A Dynamic Approach at Milan Design Week 2024

In contrast to the AI-generated shop signs experiment in Milan's ChinaTown, *NOI MEN*[1] (我们的门,"Our Gate") is a public art installation in Zona Sarpi (figure 3.3), Milan, designed by Dontstop Architettura with artwork by PAO and Tommaso Lanciani. It was created in collaboration with children from the neighborhood and serves as a symbolic entrance, celebrating cultural exchange between the local community and the Chinese cultural heritage in the area.

Fig. 3.3 Noi Men photography.

The *Noi Men* project at Milan Design Week 2024 represents a more contemporary and dynamic approach to ethnic and gender identity in visual communication. Unlike Chinatown's AI shop sign project, which focuses on revitalizing cultural heritage through AI-generated storefronts, *Noi Men* uses participatory design to explore gender inclusivity and multicultural identity in contemporary urban spaces.This dynamic branding approach contrasts with Chinatown's fixed shop sign system by allowing real-time modification of symbols, texts, and colour to reflect evolving social narratives.

Conclusion

It could be seen from Table 3.1 that while both projects aim to redefine cultural identity through visual communication, their methodologies diverge significantly. The AI shop sign project in Chinatown is heritage-driven, relying on algorithmic duration of traditional symbols.

On the other hand, the study concludes that while AI-assisted tools can enhance cultural representation, their application must be carefully curated to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or producing overly uniform representations. Moreover, visual semiotics and public engagement play a crucial role in determining whether these redesigned signs successfully communicate cultural identity. On the other hand, *Noi Men* explores identity fluidity through modular and interactive engagement.

These contrasting approaches demonstrate the spectrum of cultural visual representation, from preserving historical identity to embracing contemporary societal transformations.

TABLE 3.2. COMPARISON OF AI-GENERATED SIGNAGE VS. "NOI MEN" GATEWAY IN MILAN CHINATOWN (2024).

Feature	AI-Generated Signage in Milan Chinatown	Noi Men at Milan Design Week 2024
Main Objective	Restore cultural visibility in Chinatown	Explore fluid identity in urban design
Methodology	AI-generated visual redesign of storefronts	Interactive and participatory design approach
Cultural Symbols	Calligraphic strokes, Chinese motifs, red-gold palettes	Fluid typography, modular color schemes
Audience Engagement	Public perception surveys, AI-assisted design iteration	Real-time audience participation, social engagement
Flexibility	Static signage with AI refinement	Dynamic and evolving branding elements

1   The introduction is sourced from the official website of Centro Culturale Cinese, as referenced on their Instagram account.

3.1.2 Visual identity of Chinese cultural showcases

The cultural enclave nature of Paolo Sarpi highlights the constraints of localized design, making it essential to analyze successful cases of cultural export from China itself.

VISUAL IDENTITY OF BEIJING 2008 OLYMPICS

China's push to showcase its cultural identity on the world stage has been most prominently seen in events like the 2008 Beijing Olympics[1] and the Expo 2010 Shanghai [2]. These large-scale international events were as much cultural exchange initiatives as they were sporting or commercial exhibitions. The visual identity programs for these events were carefully crafted by multidisciplinary design teams to project a confident, authentic Chinese identity that resonates globally. We focus on the graphic design, typography, color palettes, and motifs in these cases, examining how Chinese identity was represented and the design decisions behind them.

Fig. 3.5 Beijing Olympic sports icons.

Overall, the Beijing 2008 design system achieved a balance of localization and internationalization.

It showcased Chinese identity (calligraphy, mythic symbols, lucky colors) while adhering to the universal requirements of Olympic branding (clarity, consistency, festive spirit). The success of this visual identity is often credited to its semiotic richness .Indeed, by layering meanings (e.g., a single logo simultaneously being a character, a dancer, and a welcome gesture), it communicated on multiple levels to a global audience.

1 International Olympic Committee (IOC). 2008. Official Report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. Lausanne: IOC.
2 Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). 2010. Expo 2010 Shanghai: Final Report. Paris: BIE.

TABLE 3.3. VISUAL IDENTITY SUMMERY OF BEIJING OLYMPIC. 2008.

Design Element	Description	Cultural Relevance	Image
Emblem ("Dancing Beijing")	A stylized red calligraphic form resembling the Chinese character "京" (jing, for Beijing), shaped as a dancing figure.	Represents **national identity**(seal of the nation), Beijing's heritage, and the Olympic spirit of movement. The red color references **traditional Chinese seals** and festive symbolism.	
Pictograms	Sport icons inspired by **ancient seal script strokes**, tapering brush-like forms for each Olympic sport.	Embeds **Chinese calligraphic aesthetics** into functional graphics, reinforcing a **cultural identity** while ensuring **universal readability**.	
Color Palette	Incorporated the five Olympic ring colors but emphasized **Chinese red** throughout venues and branding, accented with **gold**.	Red symbolizes **good fortune and celebration**, while gold represents **prosperity**. The combination reflects the theme "One World, One Dream".	
Typography	Bilingual design integrating a custom **Latin typeface echoing brush strokes** and a complementary **Simplified Chinese font**.	Ensures a **unified visual identity** across languages, highlighting **China's linguistic presence** on a global platform.	
Mascots (Fuwa)	Five mascots representing **each Olympic ring color** and a cultural motif:**Beibei (fish), Jingjing (panda), Huanhuan (fire), Yingying (antelope), Nini (swallow/kite).**Their names form "北京欢迎你" ("Beijing Welcomes You").	Symbolizes **cultural exchange and tradition**, with each mascot featuring **art-inspired patterns**, making them **both accessible globally and deeply rooted in Chinese heritage**.	

China hosted the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, another major platform for cultural representation. The Expo's theme "Better City, Better Life" was reflected in its visual identity, which emphasized urban modernity intertwined with cultural heritage.

For both Beijing Olympic and Expo, they share a basic requirement- a careful balance of showcasing Chinese identity without alienating a global audience. The Beijing Olympics leaned into historical arts, while Expo projected a future-oriented vision(ren [1] in word,better urban life) that still drew from fundamentals of Chinese culture (the primacy of people)

Fig. 3.6 Expo Mascot.

Fig. 3.5 Expo Design Booklet.

Lastly, both of the cultural implications are largely positive,the design teams demonstrated how to represent identity dynamically, by reinterpreting cultural symbols in modern forms. For instance, the seal-script sports icons signified that ancient art can live in modern design (figure 3.5).

Overall, the modern design template presented is not only innovative for cultural exchange events,at the same time, it also provides a cultural image application method for the ethnic enclave, which is based on ethnic exchanges.

TABLE 3.4 VISUAL IDENTITY SUMMERY OF EXPO.

Design Element	Description	Cultural Relevance	Image
Expo Emblem ("世" Character Logo)	A stylized version of the Chinese character "世"(shi, meaning "world"), depicting three human figures embracing to symbolize global unity.	Combines Chinese calligraphy with a universal humanist theme reinforcing the Expo's global participation message.	
Mascot (Haibao "人")	The blue mascot "Haibao" (海宝, meaning "Treasure of the Sea") was shaped like the Chinese character"人"(ren, meaning "human"), with tufty "hair" forming the top stroke.	Embodies the Expo's"people-oriented" spirit. The blue color represents Shanghai's maritime identity and openness to the world.	
Typography & Graphic Design	Bilingual branding with"Expo 2010 Shanghai China" in a modern sans-serif Latin font, paired with matching Simplified Chinese typography.	Traditional motifs (cloud patterns, auspicious symbols) were subtly integrated into signage and merchandise.	
Color Scheme	Green is a dominant color, symbolizing sustainability and urban development. The Expo's visuals also featured blue and orange for contrast. The China Pavilion was bright red and shaped like an inverted dougong [1] bracket.	Red symbolizes Chinese heritage, green represents growth and the future, and blue signifies global openness(sky & sea).	

TABLE 3.5 COMPARISON OF BEIJING OLYMPIC (2008) VS. EXPO(2010).

Aspect	2008 Beijing Olympics	2010 Shanghai Expo
Main Theme	Showcasing Chinese cultural heritage through visual identity and historical references.	Future-oriented urban vision, emphasizing sustainable cities and global unity.
Logo Design	"Dancing Beijing" emblem based on calligraphy(京).	"世" (world) emblem, integrating human figures & calligraphy.
Mascot	Fuwa (five mascots), each representing an Olympic ring color and Chinese cultural symbols.	Haibao, shaped as the character "人" (human), symbolizing inclusivity.
Typography	Bilingual, with a custom Latin typeface resembling brush strokes, paired with a simplified Chinese font.	Bilingual, using modern sans-serif Latin font with harmonized Simplified Chinese characters.
Visual Motifs	Traditional: Seal script, folk patterns, auspicious symbols.	Modernized: Abstracted Chinese patterns, sustainability-driven branding.
Cultural Message	National branding, projecting an ancient culture stepping onto the global stage.	Global collaboration, with China as the host facilitating world engagement.

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1   Ren (仁) is a key Confucian concept meaning "humaneness" or "benevolence," emphasizing ethical relationships and social harmony.

3.1.3 Dynamic Cultural Identity Works – Contemporary Methodologies and Case Studies

Beyond event-specific branding, cultural identity today is often represented through dynamic and adaptive design systems. Unlike a single logo or fixed motif, these approaches treat identity as flexible, co-created, or generative, evolving with context and audience. Contemporary designers leverage new methodologies—from algorithmic design and generative AI to participatory co-design and data-driven branding—to create identities that reflect cultural diversity and adapt over time.

This section explores such methodologies and highlights case studies that demonstrate innovative cultural identity representation, including dynamic branding for cities and collaborative cultural initiatives.

Hanover "Cultural City – Feel the Energy" (EIGA, 2023)
The German city of Hanover in 2023 unveiled a new cultural identity (figure 3.7) brand co-created with local cultural institutions. At its core is the"POW" symbol, a bold graphic element like an energetic burst or stylized asterisk. This symbol can pop out of the main logo and act as a container or frame for cultural content for example, in posters it might

Fig. 3.7 Visual identity of "Cultural City – Feel the Energy".

surround a classical painting when advertising a museum, or explode in colorful patterns when promoting a music festival. The flexibility of this logo was deliberate: "The flexible logo principle attracts a lot of attention but remains in the background when culture takes center stage" .
Because the brand was developed through a participatory process (with input from theaters, museums, independent artists, etc.), it was tailored to showcase Hanover's diverse cultural offerings rather than a single icon.
This approach highlights a modern ethos: the city brand is not about the city administration itself, but about providing a platform for cultural expression. By co-owning the symbol, the community sees their identity reflected in it. It's a case where inclusivity and flexibility directly contribute to a stronger cultural identity.

City of Melbourne "M" Logo (Landor, 2009)
Melbourne's logo is a three-dimensional letter "M" (figure 3.9) with faceted design. The brilliance was in its dynamic identity system– the " could appear in a multitude of patterns, images, and color schemes depending on context.

The constant element was the shape of the "M" and its geometric structure, which maintained brand recognition. Van Nes [1] (2012) praised this as "a celebration of diversity and personal interpretation that is both future-proof and iconic".

Fig. 3.8 .Melbourne's logo.

Fig. 3.9 Melbourne's logo Sketch.

1   Van Nes, Irma. Dynamic Identities: How to Create a Living Brand. Amsterdam BIS Publishers, 2012.

Nettrice Gaskins' article "Culturally Relevant GenAI + Traditional Art & Craft Practices" discusses how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) can be integrated with traditional art and craft forms to preserve and enhance cultural heritage. she made her own traditional Art & Craft Practices for practice (see detail from figure 3.10). She highlights that many patterns in various cultural art forms represent the transmission of ancestral knowledge across generations. By combining GenAI with these traditional practices, Gaskins suggests that we can create new, culturally relevant artworks that honor and continue these rich traditions,

Fig. 3.10 AI-Generated Cultural Branding Experiments.

For instance, an AI might produce a tourism logo for a region that mixes local folk patterns with the visitor's language in the tagline. The key is ensuring it's done thoughtfully to avoid the pitfalls explained in section 3.1.1. Nonetheless, the technology opens possibilities for creating many faces of a brand to connect with diverse cultural audiences.

Amuki.e

Amuki.ec is a branding project that showcases indigenous Ecuadorian cultural identity through graphic design, storytelling, and local craftsmanship. Unlike the state-driven branding seen in China's large-scale events, Amuki.ec highlights a grassroots approach, blending traditional iconography with contemporary design techniques.

Its Key Feature are:

Symbolism: The branding draws from Andean motifs, native textiles, and indigenous myths to construct a visually rich identity.

Typography & Color:

Earthy tones and handcrafted typography evoke traditional Ecuadorian aesthetics.

Contemporary Methods: The project embraces sustainable production techniques and digital storytelling to engage a modern audience while preserving authenticity.

One notable example of Vanessa Zúñiga Tinizaray's work is her project "Nunka Ánent"(figure 3.11) which translates to "The Living Forest." This

typographic specimen is dedicated to Nunkui, the powerful spirit of the land in Shuar culture. Zúñiga explores the worldview and ceremonies of the Shuar[1] people, highlighting their respectful and reciprocal relationship with nature.

Zúñiga conducts in-depth research on the visual signs of indigenous Latin American cultures. She begins by studying archaeological pieces, textiles, and other artifacts to understand the geometric patterns and symbols used by these cultures. Then she abstracts these designs into modular components, which can be combined and adapted to create new visual narratives.

Fig. 3.11 One page from project "Zúñiga".

Fig. 3.12 One page from project "Zúñiga".

In "Nunka Ánent," Zúñiga utilizes a modular grid system (see figure 3.12) to reinterpret traditional Shuar patterns into contemporary typographic forms. By doing so, she not only preserves the cultural heritage of the Shuar people but also makes it accessible and relevant to modern audiences.

The purpose of this work is to honor and disseminate the ancestral wisdom of indigenous cultures through design, fostering a deeper appreciation and pride in Latin American cultural heritage.

The 'M' Logo project by Landor (2009) and Zúñiga's 'Nunka Ánent' project of Amuki are separated by 14 years, yet both demonstrate a similar design approach. Despite the time gap, they share a common strategy of manipulating modular elements within a larger system to create dynamic visuals. These case studies highlight how grid-based dynamic design methods can evolve across different contexts while maintaining their core principles.

Shuar[1] – An indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador and Peru, known for their rich cultural traditions and close relationship with nature.

TABLE 3.6 COMPARISON OF
THREE APPROACHES TO CULTURAL IDENTITY DESIGN.

Column 1	AI-Generated Shop Signage (MDW 2024)	Chinese Mega-Event Identities (Beijing 2008 & Expo 2010)	Dynamic Cultural Identity Systems
Context & Scale	Localized experiment at a design festival; prototype signage for neighborhood shops.	Global events with massive audiences (Olympics, World Expo); nation branding on an international stage, state-driven.	Broad applications (city branding, institutions, etc.); ongoing identity usage over long term, evolving with community.
Design Methodology	Generative AI design tool with minimal human tweaking; semi-automated creative process based on prompts and training data.	Traditional design process led by expert teams (mix of designers, artists) with clear briefs and cultural research; manual crafting of each element (logo, icons, etc.); some public contests (mascot design).	Framework-driven: core constant elements + flexible components; methods include co-design workshops, algorithmic generation, iterative adaptation; brand seen as a living system.
Visual Elements & Symbols	Common ethnic motifs (e. g., dragon, lantern, calligraphic text) chosen by AI for immediate cultural signal; hybrid typography blending scripts; stereotypical but eye-catching icons.	Rich repertoire of culturally significant symbols (e.g., calligraphy, folk motifs, mascots embodying myths) carefully selected to represent heritage; distinct official logo/emblem encapsulating theme (jing-dancer, world-people).	Core logo often abstract or letter-based (frame, shape) that remains constant; interchangeable patterns, images, colors representing different cultural facets or sub-audiences; symbols can be updated or swapped based on context (e.g., seasonal or community-specific art).
Typography	Often bilingual mixing (e. g., Latin name stylized with Chinese elements); legibility vs. ornamentation balanced by AI (varies per output).	Bilingual with high professionalism: custom fonts or refined pairing to unify look; calligraphic inspiration in type for Beijing; clean sans-serifs for Expo.	Varies by case: city brands use bold custom type for logo and a flexible font palette for communications; tends to use modern, neutral typefaces to support variable graphics (type not the focus of variation, usually).
Color Palette	Bright, high-contrast (red/gold/black) leaning into cultural associations (e.g., red = China); potential lack of subtlety due to stereotypical emphasis.	Palette tied to theme: Beijing – festive red + Olympic colors; Expo – green/blue modern palette + iconic China red in architecture; colors carefully codified in design guidelines.	Often broad and not fixed: multiple palettes allowed; e.g., Melbourne's 'M' appears in limitless colors, bounded by design sensibility; colors chosen to suit context while maintaining contrast for core element.

3.2 Comparison and summary

Table 3.6 provides a high-level comparison of the three approaches examined – AI-generated shop sign, major cultural event branding, and dynamic identity systems – across key design dimensions.

In summary, dynamic cultural identity work indicates that a fluid visual system can be more effective.

Such systems, particularly grid-based design frameworks supported by emerging technologies and inclusive design processes, emphasize that cultural identity is dynamic—constantly evolving, adapting, and flourishing through change.

More importantly, a visual identity based on dynamic grid design can be infinitely expanded over time, requiring designers to integrate the element of "movement" into the visual process from the very beginning.

For example, just by changing the color and shapes in the elements of the "M" logo of "City of Melbourne", the visual representation of "M" still holds countless possibilities.

This presents a significant challenge for many designers accustomed to working with static, two-dimensional compositions. The next section will further elaborate on how the concept of "movement" serves as a fundamental starting point in the design process.

Designers now function as facilitators, establishing a framework within which cultural expression can take shape, rather than imposing a singular, fixed representation. This approach is becoming increasingly relevant in a globalized world, where brands and institutions seek to engage diverse audiences in meaningful and culturally resonant ways.

3.2 GRIDS AND VISUAL DESIGN

3.2.1 Fundamental Patterns of Grid Application in Design

In dynamic visual design, grid systems serve dual roles as spatial organizers and behavior controllers. Unlike traditional static grids that merely provide spatial segmentation references, dynamic grids utilize parametric variables (e.g., time out, user input, environmental data) to achieve the real-time reconstruction of topological structures.

RESPONSIVE TOPOLOGICAL DEFORMATION

By simulating the elastic mechanical behavior of grid nodes through physics engines (such as mass-spring models), grids can undergo realistic deformations in response to external stimuli (e.g., user interactions, and sound amplitudes). A pertinent example is the MIT Media Lab's branding system adapted in 2010 (figure 3.13).where the logo generates various iterations through software, adapting its form automatically based on the usage context.

Fig. 3.13 MIT Media Lab Identity 2010.
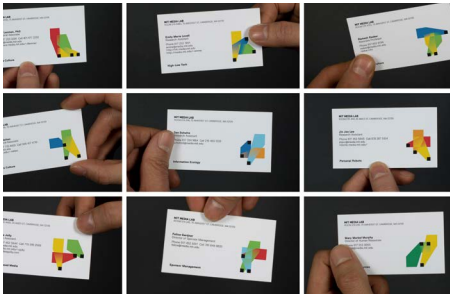
DATA-DRIVEN DENSITY ADJUSTMENT

This approach involves mapping datasets (such as real-time traffic flow, and social media sentiment indices) to the resolution parameters of grid units, achieving adaptive subdivision through Voronoi diagrams or Delaunay triangulation. For instance, Jared Tarbell's "Substrate" (2003) employs generative algorithms to create intricate Voronoi patterns, illustrating the application of data-driven density adjustment in artistic design (see projects picture in figure 3.15, 3.16).
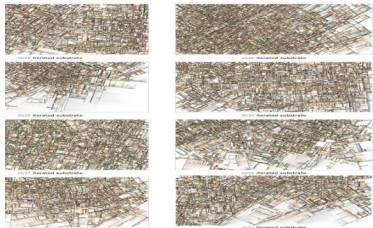
Fig. 3.15 Substrate-1.
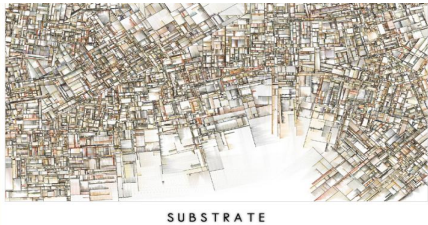
Fig. 3.16 Substrate-2.

GENERATIVE RULE ITERATION

Based on principles like L-systems or cellular automata, this method executes recursive generation rules on initial grid units to produce fractal-like dynamic graphics. A classic example is John Conway's *Game of Life* (figure 3.17,3.18) where a grid of cells, each either alive or dead, evolves based on specific rules. In this simulation, living cells are represented by black squares and dead cells by white squares. As the simulation progresses, cells transition between states according to predefined rules.
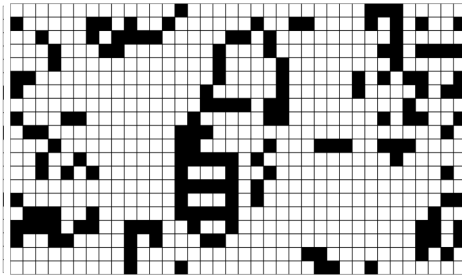
Fig. 3.17 Game of Life – Program Screenshot.
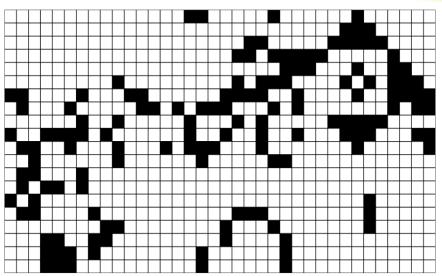
Fig. 3.18 Game of Life – Program Screenshot..

3.2.2 The Narrative Potential of Dynamic Grids

VISUALIZATION OF TEMPORAL-SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Dynamic grids can materialize the time dimension by adjusting temporal derivative parameters. In Raven Kwok's "Temporal Mesh," the oscillation frequency of grid lines is linked to audio spectra, transforming the invisible flow of time into spatial oscillation frequencies.
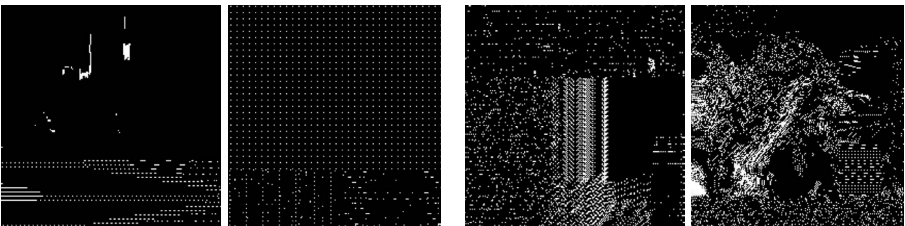
Fig. 3.19 Mono project.

Interactive grid systems, exemplified by Kim Asendorf's "MONO(2023)" (figure 3.19) introduce bidirectional data flows:

This mechanism shifts the audience from passive recipients to co-constructors of grid rules, aligning with Flusser's (2000) concept of "dialogical aesthetics."Unlike static visual compositions, interactive grids respond dynamically to user input, creating an emergent visual experience where the boundaries between creator and observer blur. The viewer's actions influence the evolution of the grid.

By engaging with these systems, viewers no longer passively consume predetermined artistic expressions but actively participate in shaping them. Furthermore, as bidirectional interaction enables continuous feedback loops, each interaction reinforces the viewer's presence within the aesthetic system, thus redefining their identity from an external observer to an integrated, dynamic participant in the artwork's unfolding visual narrative.

3.2.3 Critical Discussion: Limitations of Dynamic Grids

Current practices face the risk of algorithmic opacity—over-reliance on programmatic generation may obscure design intent and pose challenges in subsequent management, key image selection, and printing. For example, the responsive topological deformation case of the MIT Media Lab logo (2011) was redesigned in 2014 by Michael Bierut of Pentagram, moving away from generative design towards a more minimalist and functional approach (Figure 3.21). The new logo is based on a geometric grid system, clearly representing the MIT Media Lab's 24 departments while maintaining visual consistency.

Fig. 3.20 MIT Media Lab 2011 Logo Identity System.
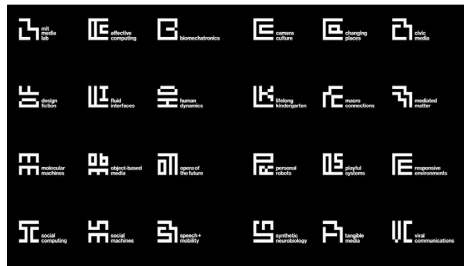
Fig. 3.21 MIT Media Lab 2014 Logo Identity System(static).

Therefore, when integrating dynamic grid systems into the design, it is advisable to implement more controllable adjustment parameters.

Potential solutions include:

-Establishing visual parameter adjustment panels, such as controls for color schemes, grid density, animation speed, line thickness, and trans- parency levels, allowing for greater customization and flexibility.

-Adopting hybrid design processes: manually setting grid anchors at keyframes, with intermediate frames generated through algorithmic interpolation.

3.2.4 Tools for getting started with generative design

Graphic designers should select tools based on project timelines and the return on investment in technology.

For short-term projects, it is preferable to utilize the AE+Figma ecosystem or emerging tools popular among motion designers, such as Cavalry. For instance, Figma a Noise Grid Generator plugin, enabling users to create simple generative grids by defining the number of circles along the X and Y coordinates, swiftly generating foundational generative graphics.
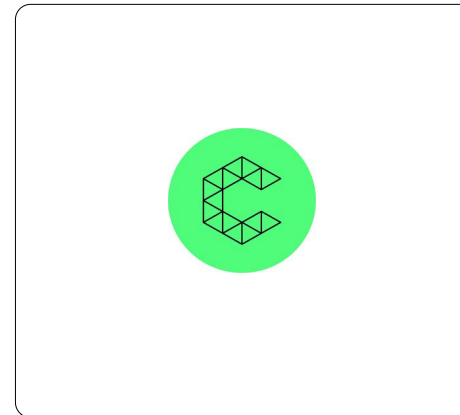
Fig. 3.22 Cavalry.

In contrast, Cavalry provides a more robust and flexible grid support system. As a rising star in motion design, Cavalry has rapidly become a preferred tool among designers due to its procedural design capabilities and real-time generation features. It includes powerful grid generation tools that allow users to create complex dynamic grid systems through straightforward parameter settings.

Its grid system not only supports basic two-dimensional layouts but also offers advanced features like parametric control, dynamic interaction, generative design tools (such as the Scatter system), and seamless integration with other tools (supporting After Effects, Figma, etc.), providing designers with a comprehensive grid support system capable of real-time complex graphic generation.

For long-term projects, acquiring basic programming skills is recommended to fully harness the expressive potential of dynamic grids. The convergence of contemporary toolchains has significantly lowered barriers to cross-disciplinary creation. For example, After Effects' support for JavaScript expressions enables greater procedural control over animations, while the ControlP5 library for p5.js provides a beginner-friendly platform for interactive visual design.

3.3 CONCLUSION

The multidimensional comparative analysis in chapter 3 demonstrates that China's cultural image construction has reached a phase of profound exploration and contemplation. Taking the visual systems of the Beijing Olympics and Expo as examples, their design logic consistently prioritizes the communication of core concepts—a practice that resonates with the cognitive mechanism proposed by Allport (1954) in The Nature of Prejudice: When stereotypes inevitably exist as cognitive byproducts, the focus should shift from eliminating symbols to shaping positive cultural stereotypes with dignity. As evidenced by the transformation of oracle bone scripts and seals into "cultural genes", constructive stereotypes can effectively replace negative labels.

TABLE 3.7 STEREOTYPED USAGE VS. CULTURAL DEPTH INTERPRETATION.

Stereotyped Usage	Cultural Depth Interpretation
Lanterns=Exotic Decor	Lanterns=Festive Memory Carriers
Dragon Motifs=Mystical Symbols	Dragon Motifs=Emblems of Cosmic HarmonyInstrumentalized SymbolsSystematized Symbols
Instrumentalized Symbols	Systematized Symbols

This cognitive shift demands designers establish new principles: while acknowledging the necessity of "quick-identification symbols" in cross-cultural communication (e.g., stereotyped Italian gestures in films), we must reconstruct symbolic value through semantic enhancement. The Paolo Sarpi enclave case in Milan is particularly representative—its merchant community primarily consists of economically driven migrants with limited education, a demographic reality that fundamentally prevents direct replication of China's domestic cultural strategies.

Consequently, Chapter 4 will conduct dual experiments: First, cultural tracing of existing symbols in Milan's Chinatown to establish translation channels between surface decorations (e.g., lantern arrays) and deep cultural memories (e.g., ancestral rituals); Second, implementation of a Dynamic Grid System that disrupts spatial fixation through temporal interventions. This approach will combine the analytical framework from Chapter 3 (which examines successful Chinese case studies) with the findings from Chapter 2 on migrant enclaves. The goal is to develop a cultural activation strategy that considers both space and time—how cultural identity is integrated into different locations and how it evolves over time.

PREFACE
PREFAZIONE
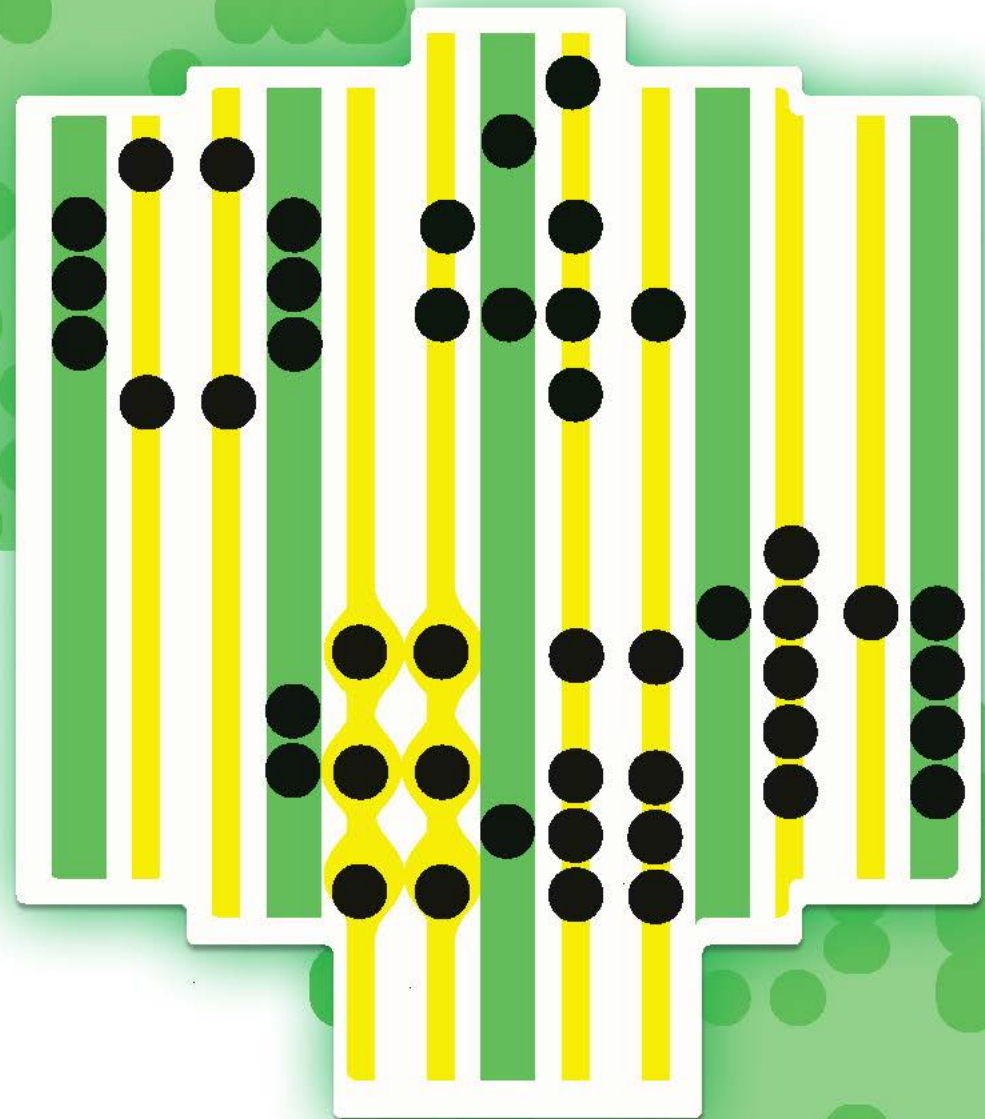
One day at a German beer festival in Varese[1], I sat with three Italian friends. Three German men dressed as traditional beer maidens served us pretzels[2]—utterly unpalatable to me. As they chatted in German around me, I felt adrift in a linguistic fog.

I lifted my beer mug, peering through the warped glass at the surroundings. The physical space suddenly turned surreal. At that moment, an internet meme echoed in my mind:

"I get so depressed realizing my foreign friends will never know how funny I am in my native language."

Just as I couldn't grasp their joy, familiar elements in Chinatown often feel alien to me as a Chinese person:

"Why Gyoza (Japanese dumplings)? Shouldn't that on the lake be a Dragon Boat?"

This epiphany struck: When cultural elements (like language) are transplanted into foreign contexts, they inevitably undergo reinterpretation. Even with identical symbols, shifting audiences erode their authenticity.

1A city in Lombardy, Northern Italy, near the Swiss border, renowned for its lake views and 19th-century neoclassical architecture. The mentioned "German beer festival" reflects its multicultural events rather than local traditions.
2. Pretzels: A traditional baked food originating from Central Europe, its iconic twisted shape is said to symbolize crossed arms in prayer. In German culture, pretzels are classic beer festival snacks, often served with mustard.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The design project titled "WHAT'S THIS" is a dynamic visual identity system built on a grid-based framework, created for the cultural platform Culturalcinese Italia. It explores new possibilities for communication models that transcend stereotypes within ethnic enclaves of host countries.

This visual system includes a comprehensive Visual Identity (VI) suite with branded collateral (calendars, tickets, menus, etc.) and an interactive poster series. The interactive posters employ dynamic, participatory design to encourage public reflection on the visual symbols of Milan's Paolo Sarpi migrant enclave, while the VI system reimagines cultural narratives through critical visual experimentation.

Key Features

CULTURAL SYMBOL EXTRACTION

Integration of traditional Chinese elements rigorously researched in migrant enclaves:

-Stereotyped "self-orientalized" symbols (lanterns, dragon patterns) commonly seen in enclaves.

-Overlooked cultural artifacts (e.g., embroidered textiles in Milanese Chinese restaurants) reflecting the enclave's "temporal frozenness."

DUAL OBJECTIVES

Prompt reflection on the deep cultural meanings behind superficial street-level symbols.

Discover of hidden cultural layers (e.g., embroidery) to expand the enclave's symbolic vocabulary and enrich Paolo Sarpi's cultural dimensions.

Color Strategy

Adopts high-saturation hues (yellow, green, black) prevalent in Chinese shops, reinterpreting traditional color codes through contemporary visual logic.

Purpose

By merging dynamic grids with participatory design, the project aims to:

-Challenge stereotyped visual narratives.

-Reactivate cultural memory in public spaces.

-Propose innovative pathways for enclave identity reconstruction.

4.2 VISUAL EXPLORATION

This section documents a series of design experiments aimed at reimagining cultural symbols within ethnic enclaves, particularly in Milan's Paolo Sarpi district. These explorations serve as a critical investigation into how visual narratives can transcend stereotypes while engaging diverse audiences. By testing various approaches—from dynamic posters to interactive platforms—I sought to identify innovative strategies that balance cultural authenticity with contemporary design practices. These experiments not only highlight the challenges of cross-cultural communication but also lay the groundwork for developing a more inclusive and reflective visual language for migrant communities.

PLAN A: KNITTED DYNAMIC POSTERS

CONCEPT

This series uses knitting patterns as a visual metaphor for the transformation of traditional cultural symbols in cross-cultural contexts. The poster features the Chinese character "灯笼" (red lantern)—a common symbol in Milan's Paolo Sarpi enclave—displayed at the top. At the bottom, the character is transliterated into "DENLON," adopting the pinyin-based naming conventions observed in Chapter 2's analysis of Chinese enclave shops. This transition from the original character to its phonetic adaptation symbolizes the cultural reinterpretation of symbols in diasporic spaces, The posters shows in the design figure a (D-Fig. a).

DESIGN EXECUTION

A vertical color gradient represents the transformation process.
The knitted grid structure serves as both a visual motif and a technical framework for dynamic coding.

MOODBOARD REFERENCES

Colors inspired by Chinese traditional visual elements (D-Fig. b,c).

LIMITATIONS

The absence of direct visual symbols (beyond text) and the use of pinyin-based transliteration ("DENLON") create ambiguity for Italian audiences, failing to bridge cultural understanding.
The intricate knitting patterns overwhelm the visual hierarchy, diluting the core message.

D-Fig. a A Knitted Dynamic Posters.

D-Fig. b A traditional entrance decorated with vibrant cultural patterns, commonly found in Chinese heritage architecture.

D-Fig. c A traditional floral plaque used to celebrate Tin Hau's birthday, a common cultural display in Chinese temple festivals.

D-Fig. d Knitted Dynamic Posters.
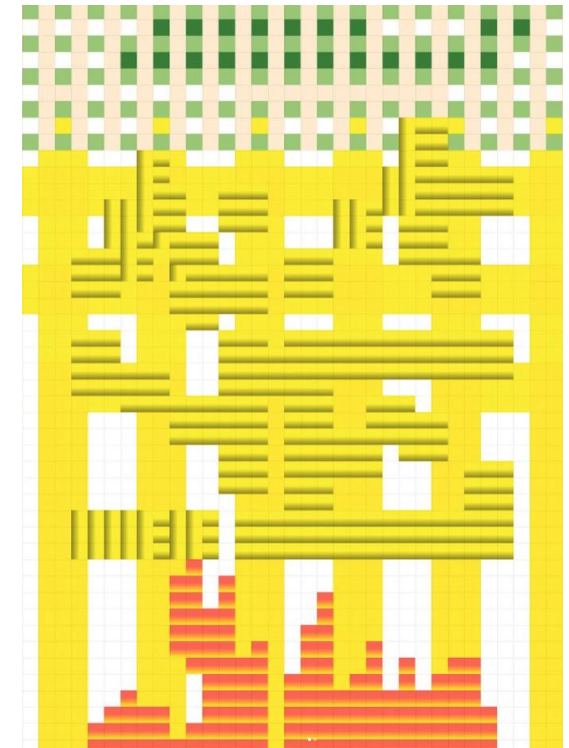
D-Fig. a

D-Fig. b

D-Fig. c
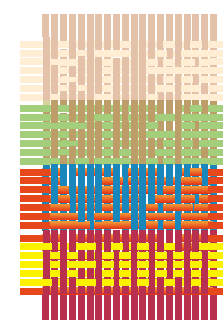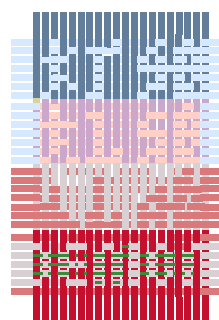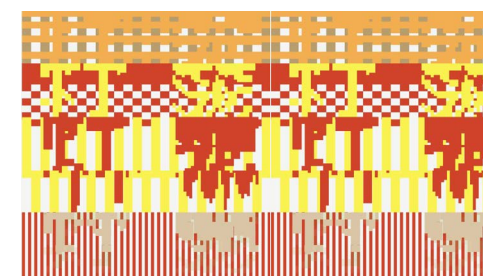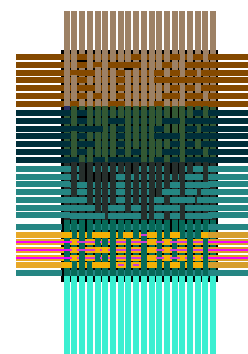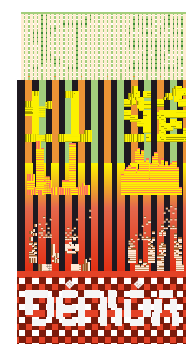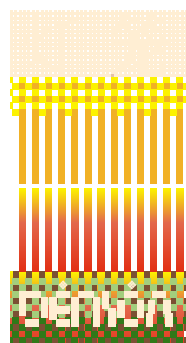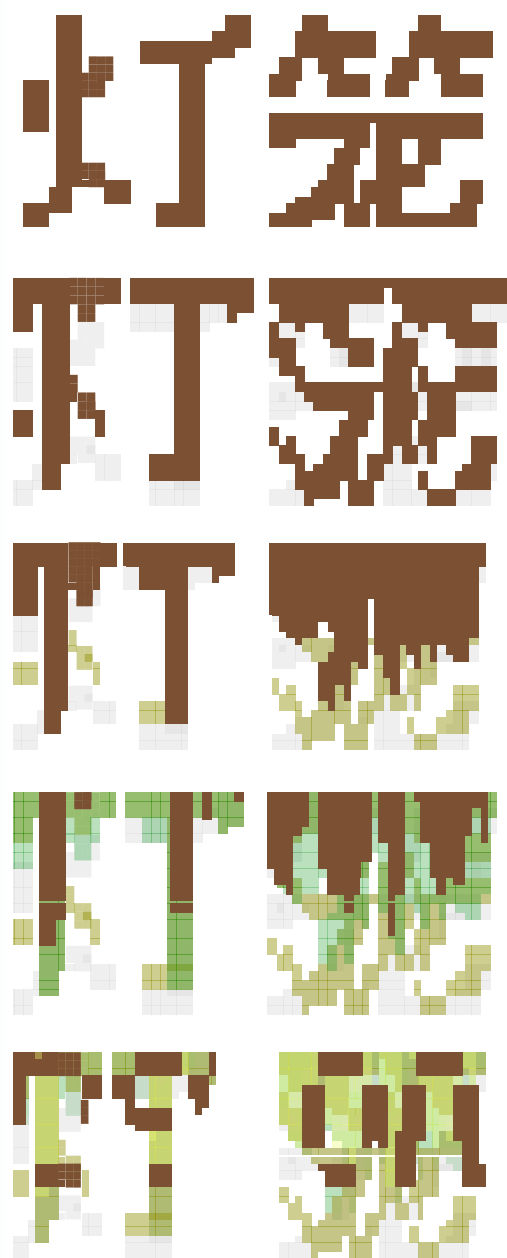
D-Fig. d

PLAN B:VInteractive Website

CONCEPT
Users customize a virtual Chinatown by selecting and recombining pre-defined ethnic symbols. While introducing participatory engagement, its web-based format limits practical application in physical enclaves(see the landing page in design figure h (D-Fig h).

LIMITATIONS
Restricted usability in real-world enclave settings due to digital platform constraints.

Ethnic Guidebook

CONCEPT
A satirical handbook "documenting" cultural symbols based on Paolo Sarpi's stereotypes, offering fictional reinterpretations of enclave iconography (see the book design structure in design figure e).

LIMITATIONS
Though effective in prompting critical reflection, it focuses on critique rather than proposing constructive solutions. However, its "fictional" framework inspired the chara cter-construction rules in the final design, particularly the "Other" category of linguistic symbols analyzed in Chapter 2.

D-Fig. e Ethnic Guidebook (designed by the author).

D-Fig. h Interactive Website.
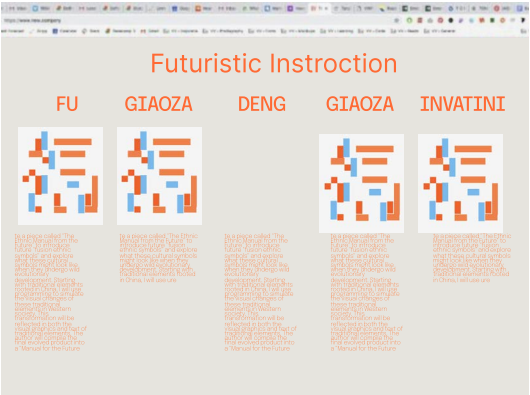
D-Fig. h

PLAN C: DYNAMIC INTERACTIVE VISUAL SYMBOL POSTERS

CONCEPT

This is a set of dynamic, interactive posters featuring two prominent cultural symbols: pasta and dumplings. The design uses a grid-based system where shapes are formed by circles of varying sizes. The interactive component allows users to manipulate the internal pixel patterns of the symbols by dragging their fingers across the screen (see the dynamic poster in design figure g (D-Fig. g) .

LIMITATIONS

The interaction mechanism lacks a meaningful connection to the cultural content itself, falling into the trap of "interactivity for the sake of interactivity." This disconnect undermines the potential for deeper engagement with the cultural narratives behind the symbols.

PLAN D: CULTURAL ENCLAVE VISUAL IDENTITY SYSTEM (PRELIMI-NARY)

CONCEPT

This early-stage visual identity system, designed for the Cultural Chinese Center, laid the groundwork for the final proposal. It included a full VI suite (calendars, tickets, menus) with aesthetics later refined in the final version, see the initial version in the design figure (D-Fig i).

LIMITATIONS

Flaws in Preliminary Version

Overuse of colors created visual clutter.

Poor integration of text and imagery obscured focal points.

This section documents design explorations from Chapter 4's early phases, showcasing iterations ultimately refined or replaced in the final proposal.

CONCLUSION

These four explorations critically shaped the final proposal:

Color: Early experiments with high-saturation hues from Chinese shops led to a refined palette (blue, yellow, black) that balances vibrancy and clarity.

Composition: Grid-based structures from dynamic posters evolved into a modular system, enabling flexible yet cohesive visual narratives.

Interactivity: Lessons from superficial digital interactions informed the final participatory design, focusing on meaningful cultural engagement over technical gimmicks.

Symbolism: Trials with overlooked artifacts (embroidery) and linguistic hybrids ("DENLON") inspired a layered approach to reinterpret tradition through contemporary coding.

Each exploration distilled essential lessons, transforming fragmented experiments into a unified, culturally resonant visual strategy.

D-Fig. i Visual Identity System (designed by the author).
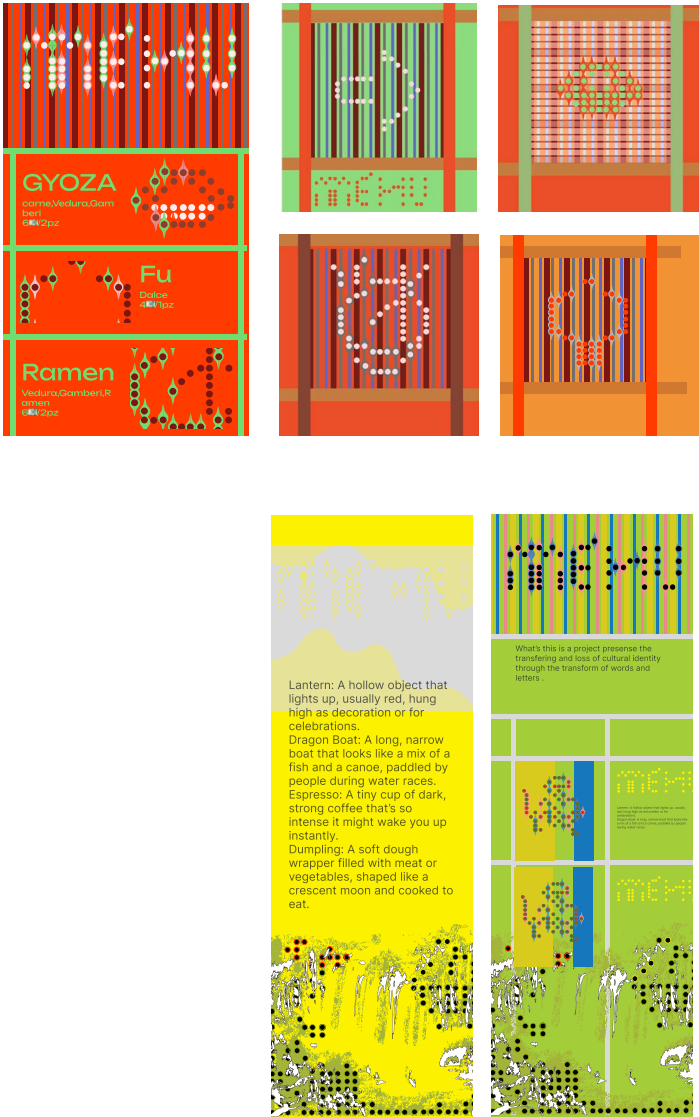
4.1 CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Design Fig. 2.
Woven texture of
plastic mesh bags

Design Fig. 3.
Illustration of the
custom grid system

Design Fig. 1. Texture Board visual reference
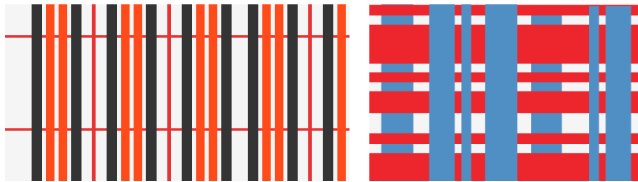
D-Fig 2
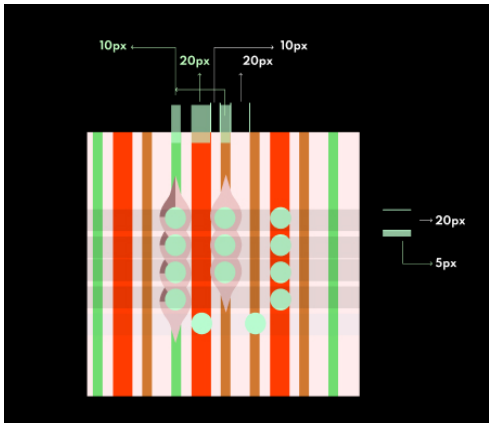
D-Fig 3

TEXTURE BOARD

Based on the grid system derived from the Texture Board, this study developed a custom Latin letter design program inspired by the visual identity of Chinatown.

Based on contemporary snitching techniques, the final design was inspired by the 蛇皮袋 (woven plastic bag), a common everyday object known for its durability and practicality.

This program enables users to create personalized Latin letters with customize table colors, stroke weights for pixel composition, and visual connections between grid-based pixel points. Additionally, users can define patterns within the grid to create unique typographic compositions with a poetic effect.

Design Fig. 4. Visual effects of different stroke weights (screenshot from p5.js interface)

Design Fig. 5. Visual effects of different colors (screenshot from p5.js interface)

D-Fig 4

CUSTOMED LETTERS

This design attempt explores a variable typeface to enhance visual adaptability. Developed in p5.js, the typeface follows a predefined grid system (see Design Figure 3) to ensure structural consistency. The design process strictly adheres to this grid, ensuring that all letterforms maintain a coherent visual rhythm.

Moreover, the composition of the typeface is directly inspired by the woven texture of 蛇皮袋 (woven plastic bags), integrating its characteristic grid-like structure into the design. The arrangement of circular elements within the grid mimics the interwoven patterns found in these bags, reinforcing a visual connection to traditional woven materials. By referencing this everyday object, the typeface embodies a blend of cultural familiarity and computational precision, creating a dynamic interplay between tradition and digital design methodologies.

D-Fig 5

Design Fig. 6. Mathematical process for defining shapes

Design Fig. 7. The eight predefined shapes (representing eight directions)

Design Fig. 8. Variations of the letter "a" (screenshot from p5.js interface)

D-Fig 6

D-Fig 7

D-Fig 8

Design Fig. 9. Display of different custom letters (screenshot from p5.js interface)

D-Fig 9
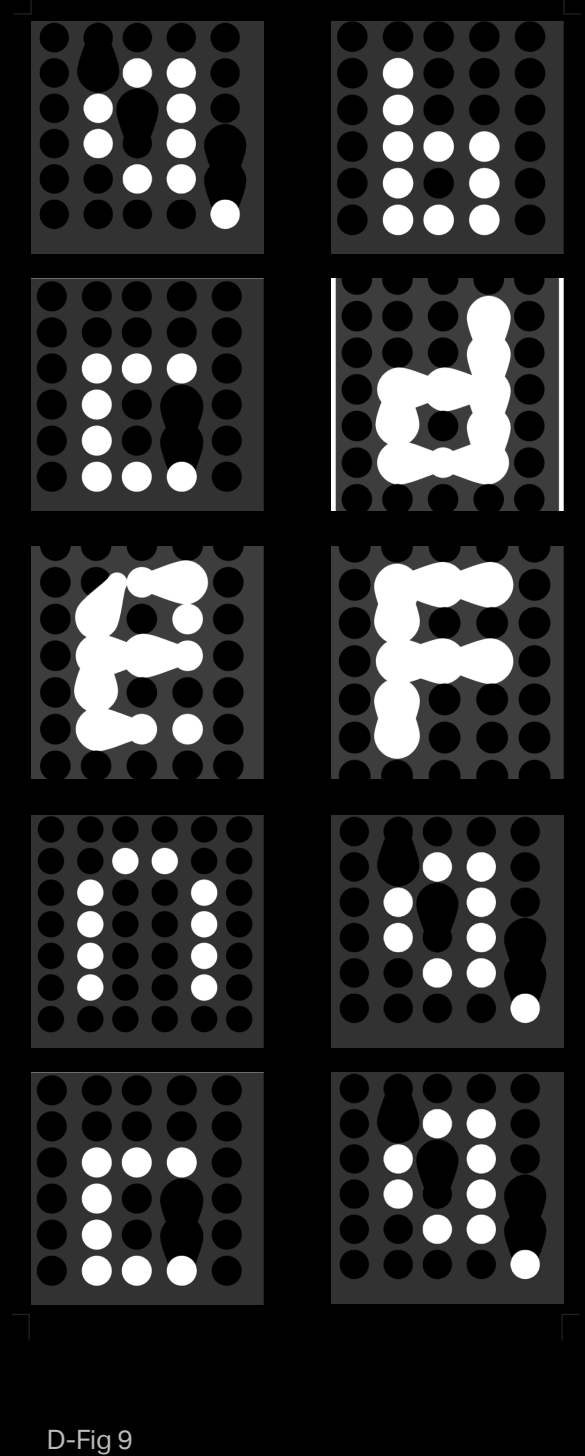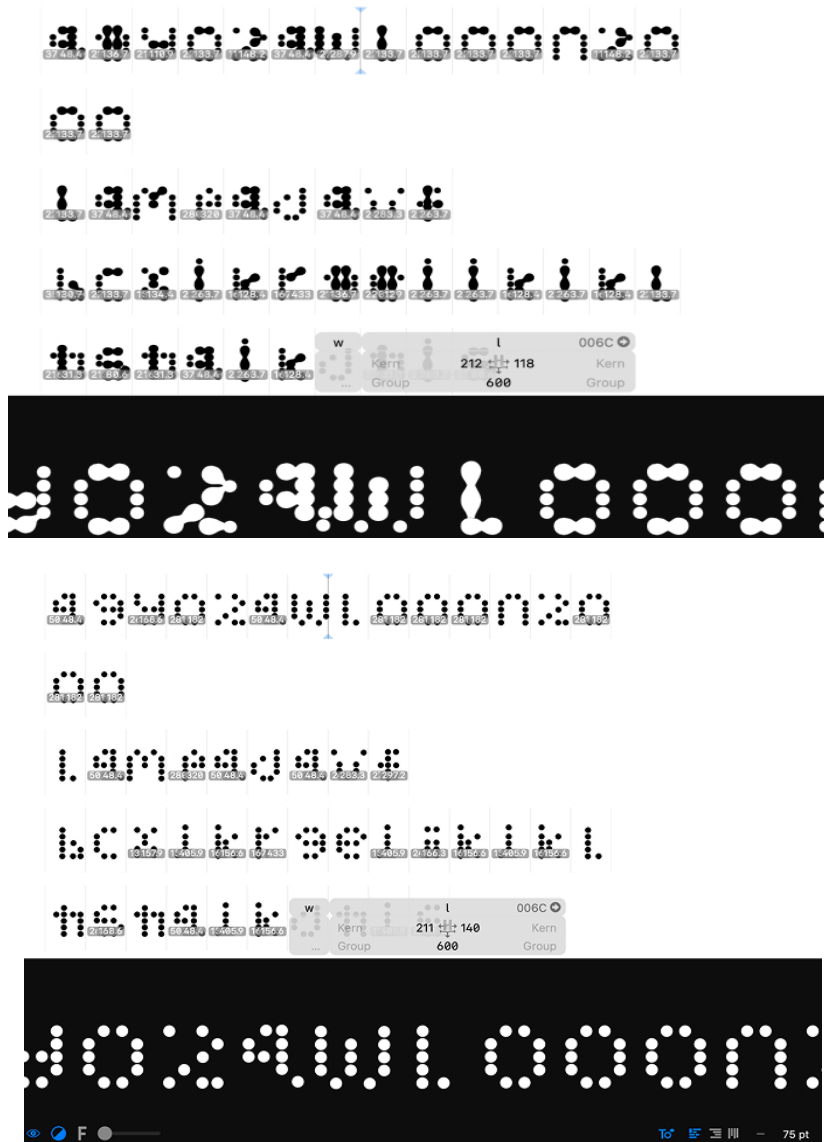
LATIN LETTER DESIGN

All generated Latin letters maintain fundamental legibility. In the follow-ing section, this study will explain the selection of the most suitable de-sign style from the custom font system, leading to the development of 2 Variable fonts design (design figure 10).

Design Fig. 11-1.
Flourishing Flowers.

D-Fig 11-1

Design Fig. 11-2.
High Mountains and
Flowing Water.

D-Fig 11-2

Design Fig. 11-3.
Vast and Grand
Vision
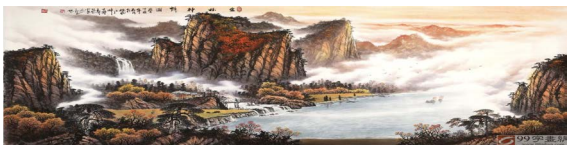
D-Fig 11-3

INTERPRETATION OF POSTER GRAPHICS

Building on the visual communication strategies of traditional Chinese imagery summarized in Chapter 3, this study explores how to select widely appreciated national symbols with strong emotional significance. The chosen reference images are classic cross-stitch patterns that were commonly found in Chinese households in the 1970s, specifically:

"Flourishing Flowers" (Design Fig. 11-1)

"High Mountains and Flowing Water" (Design Fig. 11-2)

"Vast and Grand Vision" (Design Fig. 11-3)

These images represent simple yet beautiful aspirations of the Chinese people, while also carrying the collective memory of Chinese migrant workers from the 1970s. The study processes these images into dynamic poster elements, aiming to transform static graphics into adaptable visual assets, as detailed in Design figure 12.

D-Fig 12

PROCESSING

/3 original pictures

AD   AD: Adobe Illustrator

LAYERING

AD

Colortone   Black and white logo

FIGMA   AD

Reorder the pixel
of colortone   Seperate shadow
and hilight area
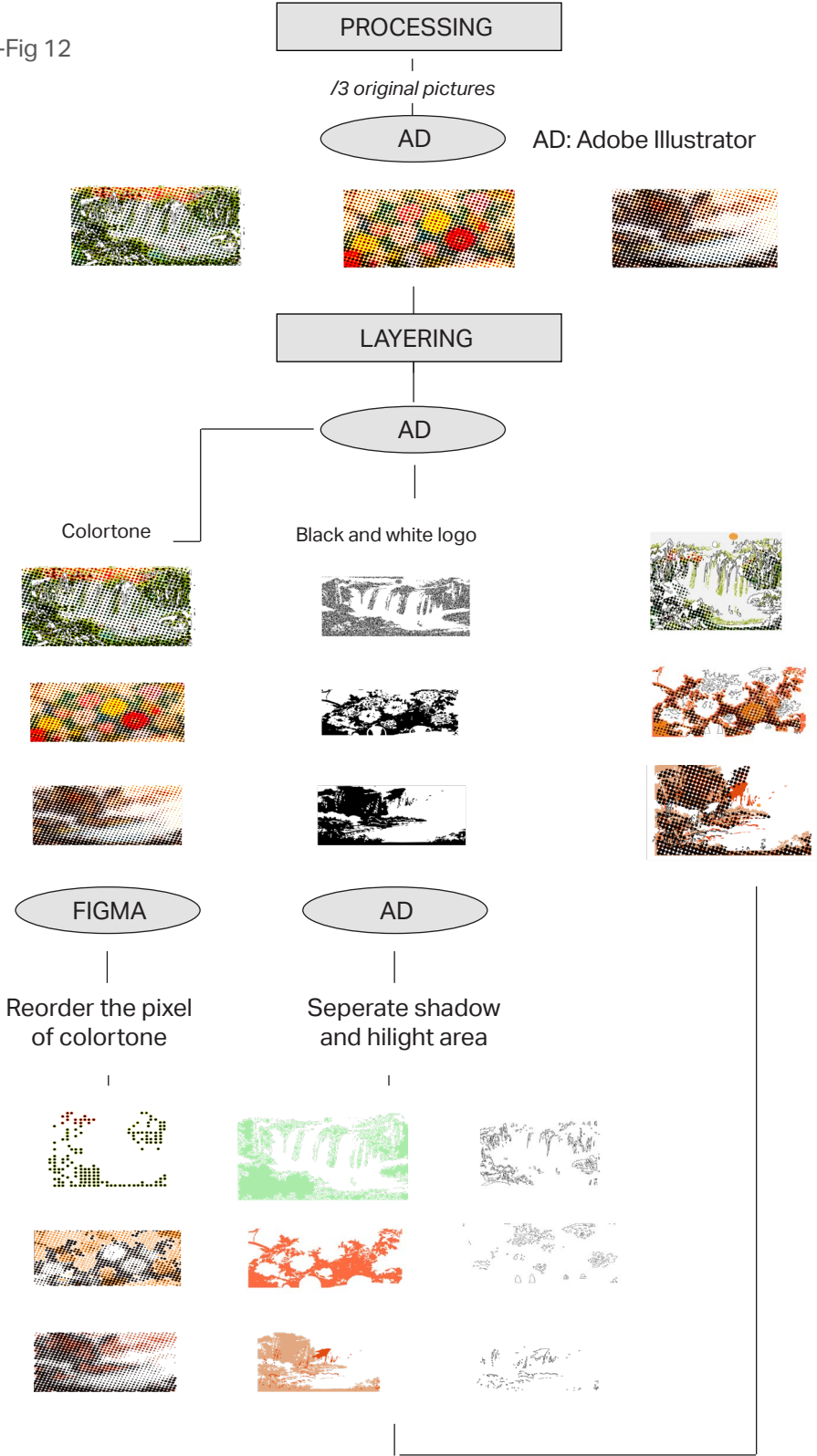
Design Fig. 13-1. "High Mountains and Flowing Water" processed with colored halftones Design Fig. 13-2. The shadow layer of "High Mountains and Flowing Water" with alternate color fills
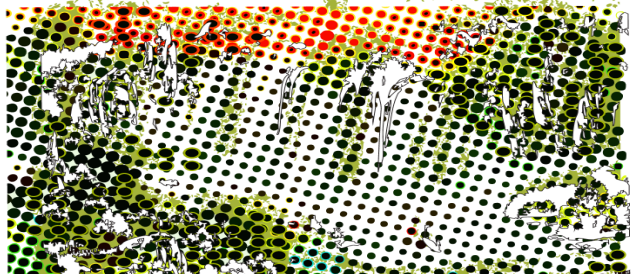
Design Fig. 13-3. The highlight layer of "High Mountains and Flowing Water" after processing
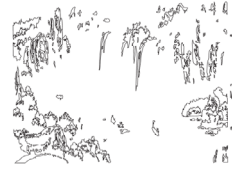
Design Fig. 13-4. The final colored halftone version of "High Mountains and Flowing Water" processed in Figma

D-Fig 13-1

D-Fig 13-2

D-Fig 13-3

Design Fig. 14. Detailed view of the final processed "High Mountains and Flowing Water" image

D-Fig 13-4
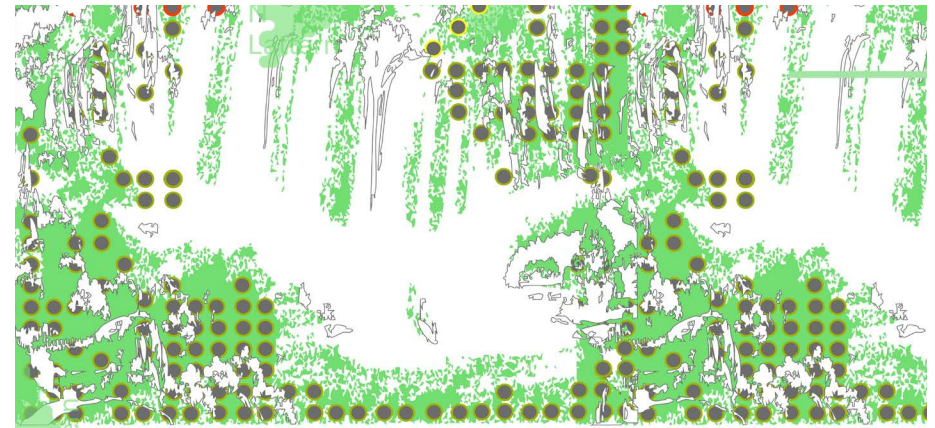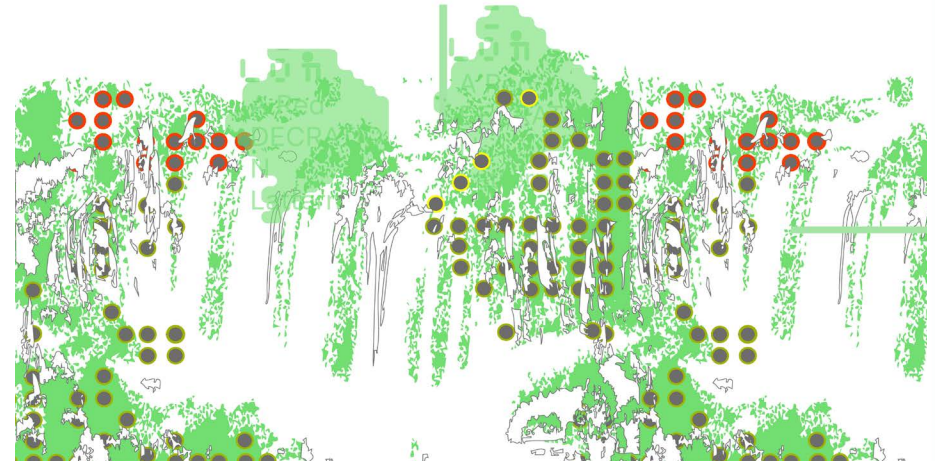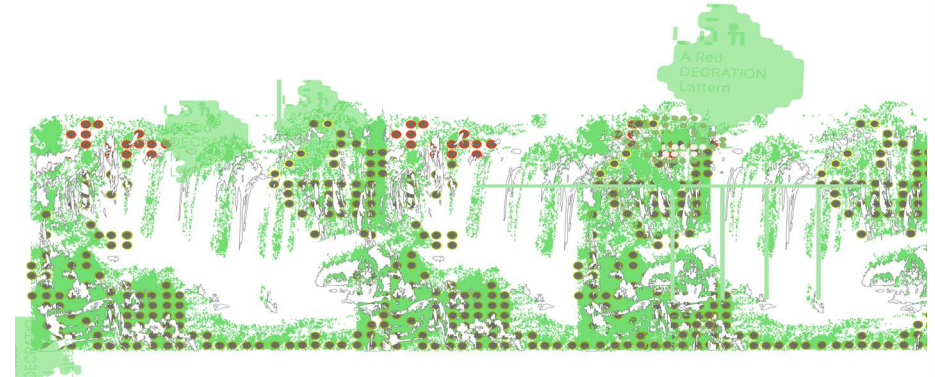
As observed in Design Fig. 14, this process results in a pixelated interplay of shadows and dots when viewed up close, while from a distance, it retains the core characteristics of Chinese cross-stitch embroidery. This approach achieves the goal of conveying traditional motifs within a modern or contemporary design language.

D-Fig 14. . Detailed view of the final processed "High Mountains and Flowing Water" image

D-Fig 15-1

START

CHOOSE ONE OBJECT

TYPE THE NAME OF THE OBJECTS YOU CHOOSE

[Note: The first language should be used.]

examples

	Italian		Italian		Italian		Italian
Raviolo		Lanterna		Espresso		Pasta	
	Chinese		Chinese		Chinese		Chinese
饺子		灯笼		浓缩		意面	
	English		English		English		English
Dumpling		Lantern		Coffee		Pasta	
	Others		Others		Others		Others
...		...		...		...	

GENERATE

Count the number of pixels that make up the characters the user types.

Match the object the user selects with a predefined text in the system.

Dynamic Symbol

Phonic-Based Naming

CUSTOMED POSTER

INTERPRETATION OF DYNAMIC SYMBOLS

The dynamic symbols in this study serve as an interactive component of the design project. Since the central symbols in the poster (Design Fig. 15) are generated from user-input text (see the workflow in design figure 15 -1 (D - Fig. 15-1)), each user produces a unique visual identity, reinforcing the participatory nature of the design.

Design Fig. 15. Dynamic symbol illustration
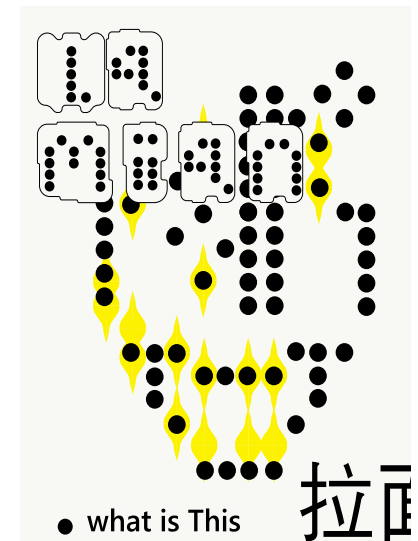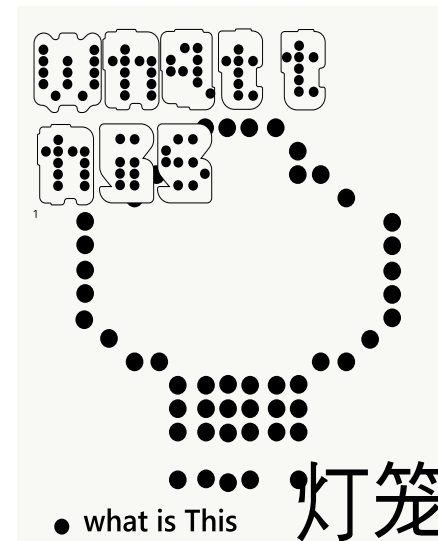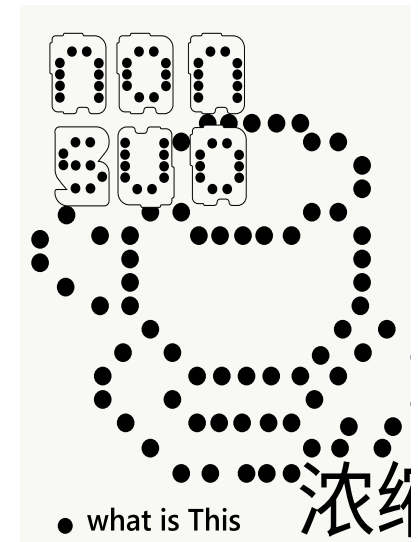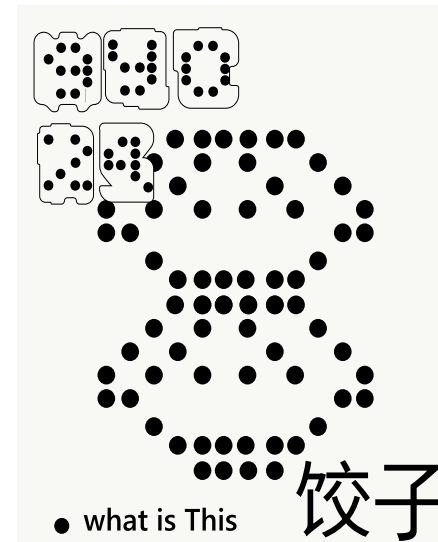
Based on the conclusions drawn in Chapter 3 regarding how to create more respectful "stereotypical symbols," this dynamic identity design selects two culturally significant symbols from China—the lantern and the dumpling, both commonly seen in Paolo Sarpi. Additionally, two symbols from Italy—espresso and pasta—are included, as they have also been flattened into singular visual representations in other countries.

As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) pointed out, globalization leads to the "flow and rupture" of cultural symbols, causing their original meanings to be altered in cross-cultural communication. The four selected symbols have different cultural meanings in their place of origin compared to their interpretations abroad, as illustrated in Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1. COMPARISON OF STEREOTYPE USAGE AND CULTURAL DEPTH INTERPRETATION

Stereotyped Usage	Cultural Depth Interpretation
Lantern = Exotic Decoration	Lanterns=Festive Memory Carriers
Dumpling = Fast-Food Chinese Cuisine	Dumpling = Reunion, Festival, Family Tradition
Espresso= Commercialized Symbol	Nonsuo = Symbolic Layers, Loss of Meaning in Linguistic Translation
Pasta = Italian Cultural Symbol	Pasta = Regional Culinary Tradition, Diversity

Based on an understanding of these four cultural symbols, this design deliberately blurs and flattens their visual representations to prompt viewers to ask the fundamental question: What is this?

Typographic and Linguistic Approach:

This design utilizes a combination of Italian, Chinese, and the "hybrid construction method" found in the Other category of shop signs (as discussed in Chapter 2). These symbols are renamed using phonenic adaption as explored in Chapter 2 which helps preserve cultural identity.

This parallels the naming conventions seen in certain businesses, such as the Wang Oriented Store, where the use of Pinyin-based naming constructs an ambiguous identity. Thus, in this project, visual symbols and their accompanying text mirror the dominant linguistic trend in Chinatown shop signs: CONTAINS OTHERS. Together, they create a semiotic gap that encourages viewers to ask: What's this?

However, the purpose of this project is not to confuse the audience but rather to prompt reflection. Given that English is the third most common combination found in bilingual shop signs, and considering the overwhelming presence of CLS (the shop signs which contain Chinese Characters) signs, the explanatory text in the following section will adopt a Chinese-English mixed approach to align with the linguistic landscape observed in Paolo Sarpi.

4.3 RESULTS
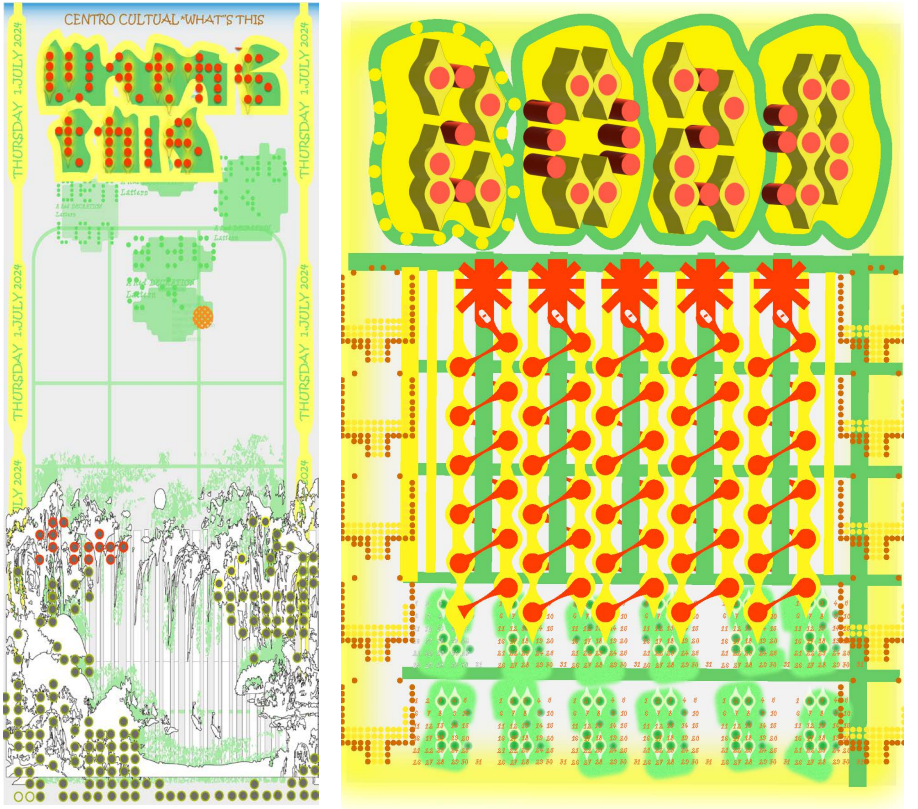
The final outcome of this study is a comprehensive visual identity system for Chinatown's enclave aesthetics,including:
    -A dynamic visual symbolic system
    -Poster design (design figure 18)
    -Menu design (design figure 19)
    -Various design applications(design figure 16)
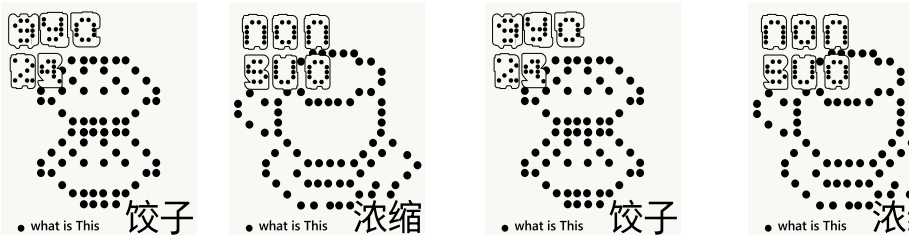
Design Fig. 17. Chinese Zodiac Snake Year Calendar.

D-Fig 17
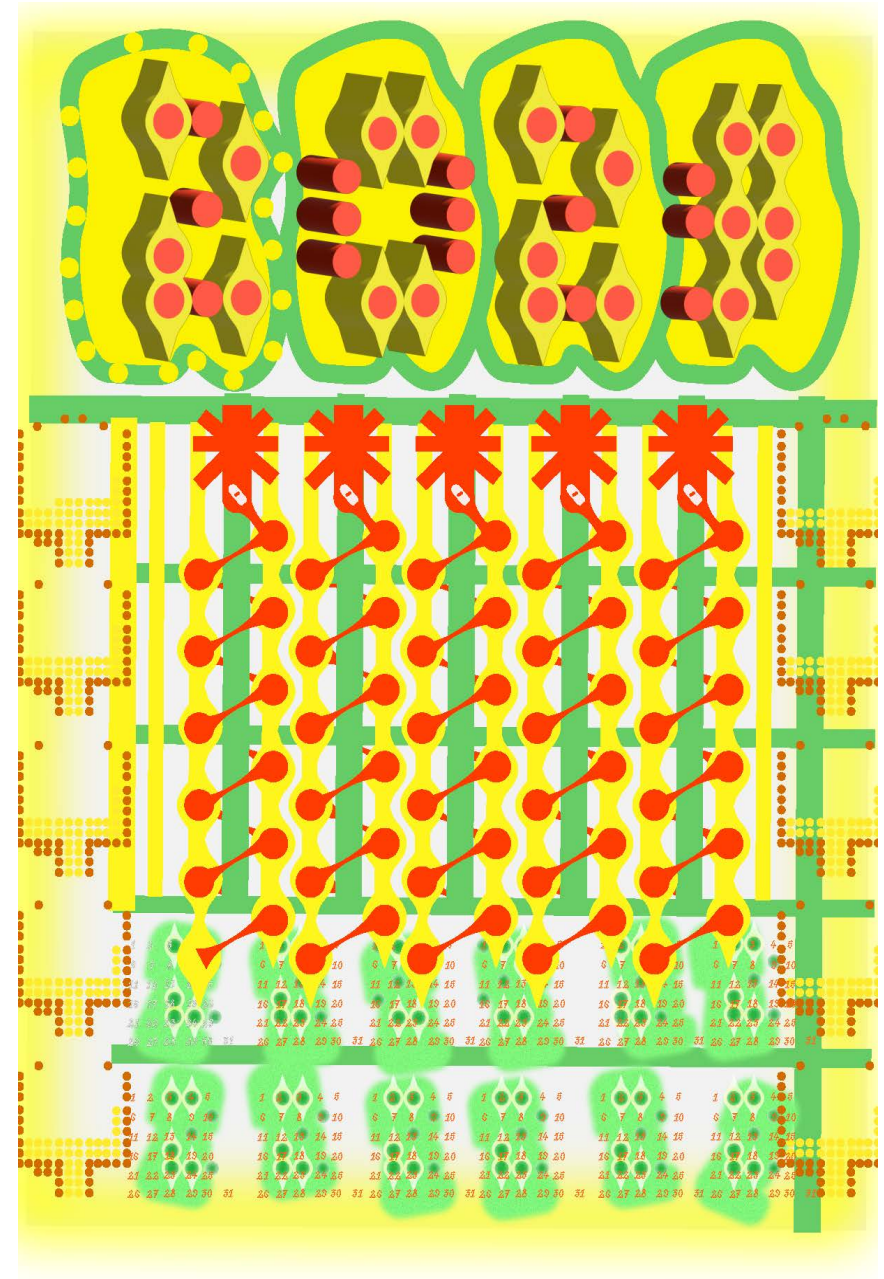
INTERPRETATION OF THE SNAKE YEAR CALENDAR POSTER

The Snake Year poster adopts a high-contrast yellow-green color palette, a commonly used scheme in Chinese restaurants. However, unlike traditional Chinese calendars, this design features:

-High-saturation contrasting colors to enhance visual impact.

-A background that mimics traditional ink-printed Chinese calendars, preserving their classic aesthetic.

-3D effects in the header, inspired by Chinatown's neon signboards, ensuring prominence within urban landscapes.

-A symmetrical layout, borrowing from the structural composition of Chinese couplets.
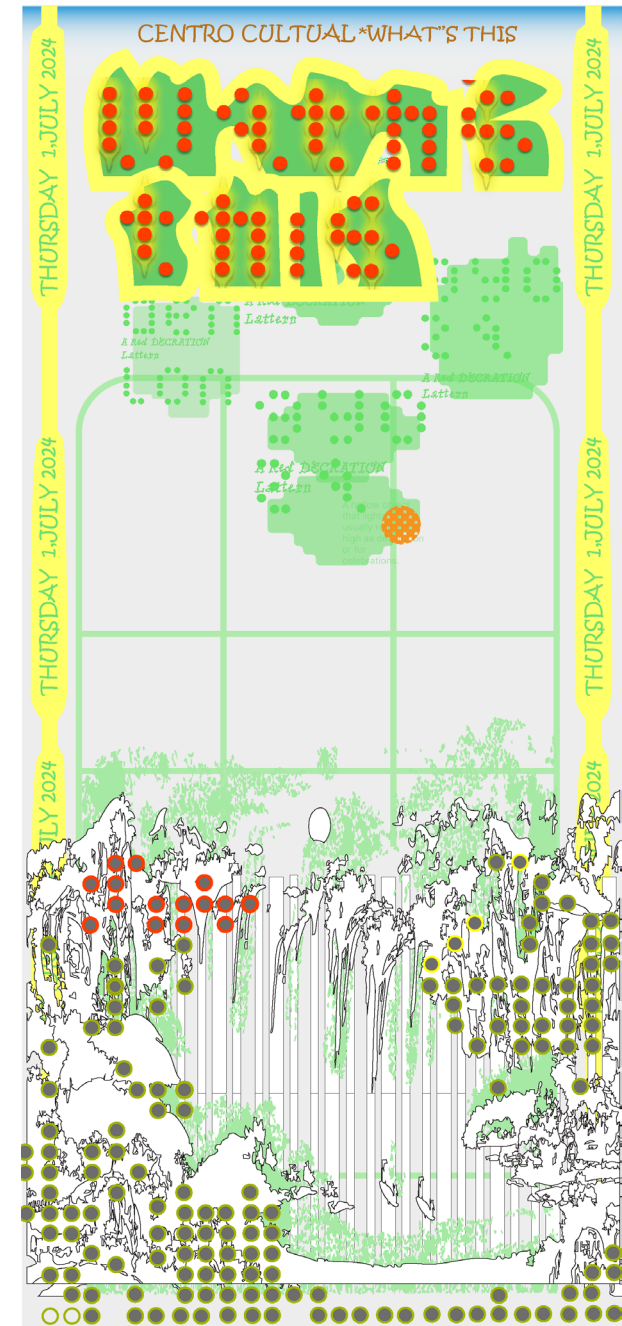
INTERPRETATION OF POSTER

The invitation poster integrates previously discussed cross-stitch imagery, and enhances its ethnic enclave attributes through the following design choices:

-Classic landscape motifs in the background

-Four surrounding dynamic symbols derived from the visual identity system.

-Reduced transparency and softened edges, resulting in a map-like visual effect.

-Adjusted text placement, ensuring balanced composition,

121   122
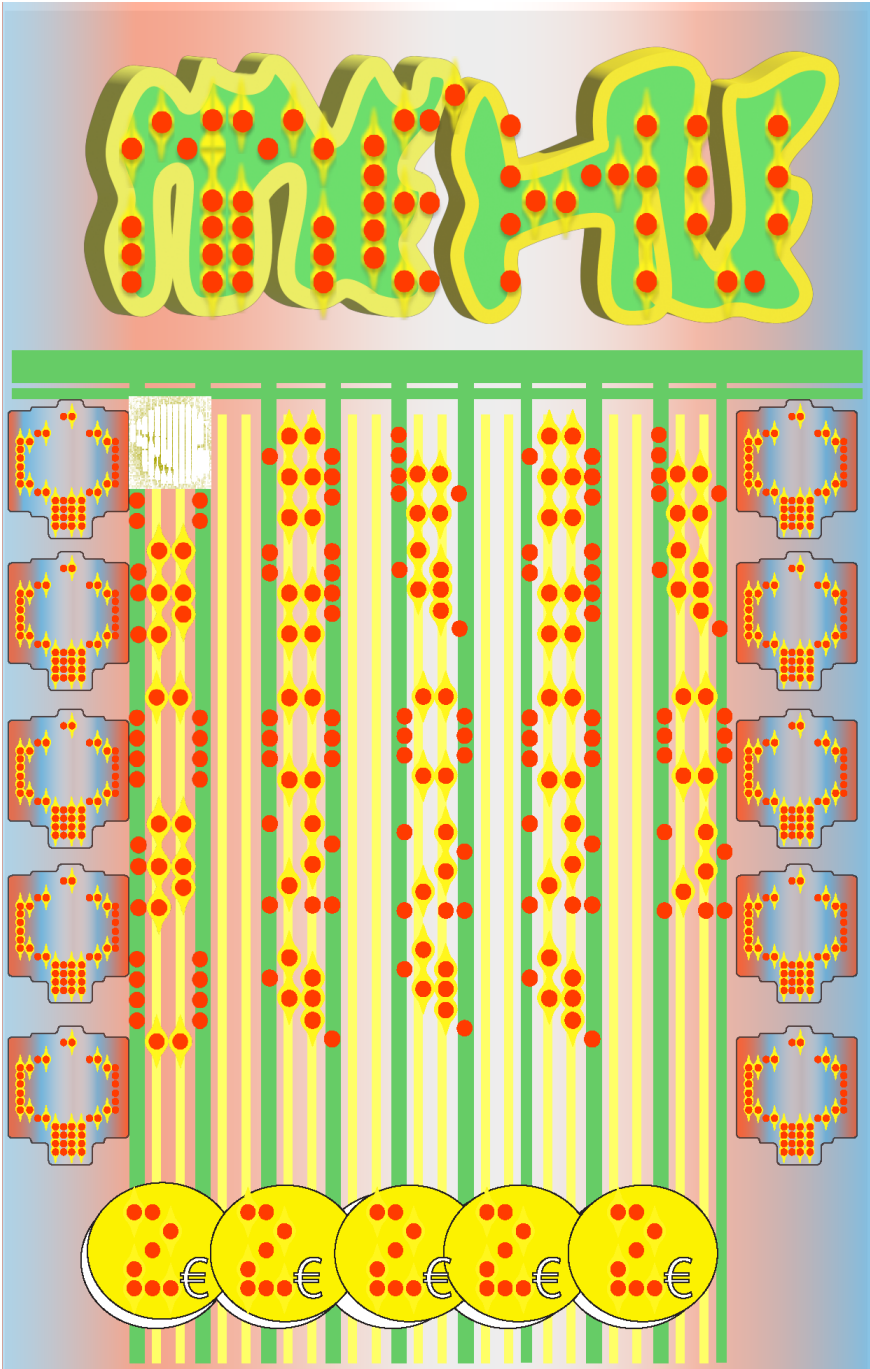
INTERPRETATION OF THE MENU DESIGN

The menu design maintains color and composition consistency with the previous cases while incorporating experimental typography:

Dish names are structured using homophones, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Text is arranged in traditional Chinese vertical writing format, reinforcing cultural authenticity.

Conclusion

This study develops a comprehensive visual identity system for Chinatown, integrating dynamic symbols, posters, and menu design. The approach ensures that cultural elements are preserved while adapting to contemporary design aesthetics, offering a novel perspective on ethnic enclave visual representation.

CODE

This section explains the code and emphasizes the key visual aspects. The goal is to illustrate the challenges encountered when considering VI design from a dynamic perspective and the specific methods used to address them. This thought process can serve as a reference for designers who aim to integrate coding into their workflow for dynamic design.

CODE FOR CUTOMED FONT

```
let  shapes=[];let  grid=[];let  rows=7,cols=6;let
a=50;let slider1;let slider2;

function setup(){
createCanvas(700,700);
slider1=createSlider(0,255,0,0);
slider1.position(200,700);
slider1.size(80);
slider2=createSlider(0,20);
slider2.position(10,700);
slider2.size(80);

shapes[0]=function(x,y,w,h){ellipse(x-
,y,1.5*a,1.5*a);};

shapes[1]=function(x,y,w,h){
let centerX=x;
let centerY=y-4;
let bigR=h*0.6; // Large circle radius
let smallR=a*0.5; // Small circle radius
let topCenterY=centerY-bigR-smallR-20;

beginShape();
push();
vertex(centerX-smallR,topCenterY);

// Top arc of the small circle (approximate using two
bezier curves)
bezierVertex(centerX-smallR,topCenterY-small-
R*0.55,centerX-smallR*0.55,topCenterY-small-
R,centerX,topCenterY-smallR);
bezierVertex(centerX+smallR*0.55,topCenterY-small-
R,centerX+smallR,topCenterY-smallR*0.55,centerX-
+smallR,topCenterY);

// Transition from the small circle's right edge to
the large circle's rightmost point
bezierVertex(centerX+smallR,topCenterY+small-
R*0.5,centerX+bigR,centerY-bigR*0.5,centerX+-
bigR,centerY);

// Bottom arc of the large circle
bezierVertex(centerX+bigR,centerY+bigR*0.5,centerX-
+bigR*0.55,centerY+bigR,centerX,centerY+bigR);
bezierVertex(centerX-bigR*0.55,centerY+-
```

```
bigR,centerX-bigR,centerY+bigR*0.5,cen-
terX-bigR,centerY);

  // Connect back to the top small circle
  bezierVertex(centerX-bigR,centerY-bigR*0.5,center
X-smallR,topCenterY+smallR*0.5,centerX-smallR,top-
CenterY);
  pop();
  endShape(CLOSE);
  };

  // Variations of shape 1 with different rotations
  shapes[2]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(-PI/6);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[3]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(PI/2);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[4]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(QUARTER_PI*3);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[5]=function(x,y,w,h){push();fill(0);el-
lipse(x,y,1.5*a,1.5*a);pop();};
  shapes[6]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(-PI/2);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[7]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(PI);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[8]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(-QUARTER_PI*3);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};
  shapes[9]=function(x,y,w,h){push();translate(x-
,y);rotate(PI/6);shapes[1](0,0,w,h);pop();};

  for(let   i=0;i<rows;i++){grid[i]=[];for(let   j=0;-
j<cols;j++){grid[i][j]=0;}}
  }

  function draw(){
  let g=slider1.value();
  fill(255);
  background(g+50);
  let b=slider2.value();
  strokeWeight(b);
  let cellWidths=[2.5*a,2*a,2*a];
  let cellHeight=1.8*a;

  for(let i=0;i<rows;i++){
  let y=i*cellHeight+cellHeight/2;
```

```
  for(let j=0;j<cols;j++){
  let currentCellW=cellWidths[j%cellWidths.length];
  let x=0;
  for(let     k=0;k<j;k++){x+=cellWidths[k%cellWidths.
length];}
  x+=currentCellW/2;
  let shapeIndex=grid[i][j];
  shapes[shapeIndex](x,y,currentCellW,cellHeight);
  }}
  }

  function mousePressed(){
  let cellWidths=[2.5*a,2*a,2*a];
  let cellHeight=2*a;
  let row=floor(mouseY/cellHeight);
  let col=-1;
  let acc=0;
  for(let j=0;j<cols;j++){
  let currentCellW=cellWidths[j%cellWidths.length];
  if(mouseX<acc+currentCellW){col=j;break;}
  acc+=currentCellW;
  }
  if(row>=0&&row<rows&&col>=0&&col<cols){grid[row]
[col]=(grid[row][col]+1)%shapes.length;}
  }
```

CODE FOR DYNAMIC SHAPES

```
    let a = 10;
    let d ;
    let startX = 5;
    let startY = 50;
    let activeGrid2 = [];
    let baseGrid2 = [
    [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    1,  1,  1,    1,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    1,  1,  1,    1,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    1,  0,  1,  0,  0,
 0,    1,  1,  1,    1,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    1,  0,  1,  0,  0,
 0,    1,  1,  1,    1,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    1,  0,  1,  0,  0,

 0,    1,  1,  1,    1,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    1,  1,  1,  1,  1,
 1,    1,  1,  1,    1,  1,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  1,  1,  1,  1,
 1,    1,  1,  1,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
     [0,     0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0,    0,  0,  0,    0,  0,  0,  0,  0,  0,
 0]  ,
    ];

    function setup() {
      let width = 500;
      let height = 600;
      createCanvas(width, height);
      //pixelDensity(window.devicePixelRatio); // Sets
canvas pixel density to match display
      smooth();
      pg = createGraphics(800, 800, P2D);
      tilePG = createGraphics(400, 300, P2D);
      //frameRate(300);
      textLeading(70);
      textAlign(LEFT, CORNER);
      for (let i = 0; i < baseGrid2.length; i++) {
        activeGrid2[i] = baseGrid2[i].slice();
      }
```

```javascript
  }
  function draw() {
    background(255);
    noStroke();
    let xPos = 0;

    while (xPos <= width) {
      //fill(153, 255, 153);
      xPos += 4 * a;
      fill(255, 245, 57);
      rect(xPos - a, 0, a, height);
      fill(255, 0, 0);
      xPos += 2 * a;
      fill(255, 245, 57);
      rect(xPos, 0, a, height);
      xPos += 2 * a;
    }

    let cellWidth = [2 * a, a, a];
    let cellHeight = 2 * a;
    let xSpacings = [a, 2 * a, a];
    let ySpacing = 8;

    let grid1 = [
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   1,   1,
1,   1,   1,   1,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,
1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   1,   1,   1,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   1,   1,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   1,   1,   1,
1,   1,   1,   1,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   1,   1,   1,
1,   1,   1,   1,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    [0,    0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,   0,
0]   ,
    ];
```

```
    for (let i = 0; i < grid1.length; i++) {                      //fill(238, 57, 17);
      let yPos = startY + i * (cellHeight + ySpacing);            fill(50);
      let xPos = startX;                                          ellipseMode(CENTER);
      for (let j = 0; j < grid1[i].length; j++) {                 ellipse(xPos, yPos, 2 * a, 2 * a);
        let currentWidth = cellWidth[j % cellWidth.             } else {
length];                                                          strokeWeight(1);
        if (grid1[i][j] == 1) {                                   fill(50);
          if (currentWidth == a) {                                ellipseMode(CENTER);
                                                                  ellipse(xPos + a / 2, yPos, 2 * a, 2 * a);
            noStroke();                                         }
            fill(255, 245, 57);                                }
            beginShape();                                      xPos += currentWidth + xSpacings[j % xSpacings.
          vertex(xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos - cur-   length];
rentWidth * 2);                                            }
            bezierVertex(xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos    }
- 1.5 * currentWidth,
                         xPos - currentWidth * 1.5,       for (let i = 0; i < baseGrid2.length; i++) {
yPos - 1.5 * currentWidth,                                  for (let j = 0; j < baseGrid2[i].length; j++) {
                         xPos - currentWidth * 1.5,          if (baseGrid2[i][j] === 1) {
yPos);                                                        if (random(1) < 0.01) {
            bezierVertex(xPos - currentWidth * 1.5,            activeGrid2[i][j] = activeGrid2[i][j] ===
yPos + 1.5 * currentWidth,                                1 ? 0 : 1;
                         xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos            }
+ 1.5 * currentWidth,                                         }
                         xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos       }
+ 2 * currentWidth);                                      }
            endShape();
            beginShape();                                   let osc = sin(frameCount * 0.05);
          vertex(xPos + currentWidth / 2, yPos - cur-     let d = map(osc, -1, 1, a, 2 * a);
rentWidth * 2);
            bezierVertex(xPos + currentWidth / 2, yPos    for (let i = 0; i < activeGrid2.length; i++) {
- 1.5 * currentWidth,                                       let yPos = startY + i * (cellHeight + ySpacing);
                         xPos + currentWidth * 1.5,         let xPos = startX;
yPos - 1.5 * currentWidth,                                  for (let j = 0; j < activeGrid2[i].length; j++) {
                         xPos + currentWidth * 1.5,           let currentWidth = cellWidth[j % cellWidth.
yPos);                                                    length];
            bezierVertex(xPos + currentWidth * 1.5,          if (activeGrid2[i][j] === 1) {
yPos + 1.5 * currentWidth,                                    if (currentWidth === a) {
                         xPos + currentWidth / 2, yPos          noStroke();
+ 1.5 * currentWidth,                                          fill(255, 245, 57);
                         xPos + currentWidth / 2, yPos          beginShape();
+ 2 * currentWidth);                                          vertex(xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos - cur-
            endShape();                                   rentWidth * 2);
            strokeWeight(1);                                     bezierVertex(xPos - currentWidth / 2, yPos
                                                          - 1.5 * currentWidth,
```

05 CONCLUSION

This study examines ethnic enclaves on a global scale, with a particular focus on Paolo Sarpi in Milan—the city's most concentrated commercial street for Chinese cultural and economic activities. The research first analyzes the geosemiotic elements of this area and extends its discussion in Chapter 3 through case studies of regional design projects. Ultimately, insights from contemporary design cases lead to the development of a dynamic grid-based design methodology. In Chapter 4, this study proposes a participatory cultural identity design approach for Milan's ethnic enclaves, including:

An interactive poster program — designed to prompt viewers to reflect on cultural identity.

The Centro Culturale Cinese a Milano — used as an application scenario for a complete visual identity (VI) design system.

Based on these investigations and practices, the study reaches the following conclusions:

1. The "Frozen" Nature of Ethnic Enclaves and Cultural Stereotypes

Cultural stereotypes are an inevitable element of immigrant enclaves. One defining characteristic of these spaces is the prevalence of symbolic systems representing ethnic identity. These symbols often exhibit a "frozen" quality, reflecting the cultural state of the migrants at the time of settlement rather than the latest developments in their original culture. However, this "frozen" nature is neither inherently negative nor positive—diasporic communities embellish their enclaves with symbols drawn from memory, forming a cultural landscape deeply connected to the past. Thus, what is perceived as "old" is not necessarily outdated or problematic, but rather a distinctive way in which migrant cultures take root in foreign lands.

2. How Can Design Intervene in Ethnic Enclaves?

When designing visual identities for ethnic enclaves, it is crucial to consider how contemporary design methods can engage with these "frozen" cultural landscapes. This study proposes a dynamic grid-based approach to visual identity as a viable strategy for cultural representation:

By extracting dominant symbolic elements within ethnic enclaves—such as text arrangements, colors, and phonetic adaptations—designers can innovate while maintaining a connection to cultural memory.

By restructuring these symbols dynamically, they can be recontextualized and assigned new meanings within a modern framework.

3. The Unique Nature of Ethnic Enclave Design

Ethnic enclaves function as specialized experimental zones for design, characterized by a distinct temporal "freeze" while also holding immense semiotic potential. Appropriate design interventions can revitalize these spaces, transforming them into sustainable and culturally inclusive semiotic landscapes. Given that ethnic enclaves inherently possess rich cultural attributes, their symbolic environments are not static—rather, they can be actively redefined through design methodologies, fostering a more vibrant and dynamic mode of cultural communication.

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